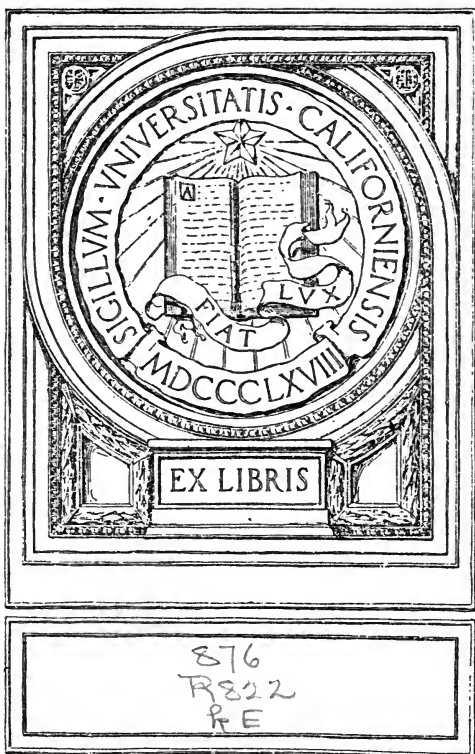


THE KING



KARL ROSNER



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THE KING

"Soft, and from a noble stem, this royal flower had sprung up under the immediate influence of majesty: the idea of moral rectitude with that of princely elevation, the feeling of the good and dignified with the consciousness of high birth, had in time been unfolded simultaneously. He was a prince, by birth a prince; and he wished to reign, only that good men might be good without obstruction."—"Wilhelm Meister," IV., 3.

The time is out of joint : O cursèd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right !

"In these words, I imagine, will be found the key to Hamlet's whole procedure. To me it is clear that Shakespeare meant, in the present case, to present the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it. . . . A lovely, pure, noble and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear and must not cast away. All duties are holy to him; the present is too hard. Impossibilities have been required of him. He winds, and turns, and torments himself; he advances and recoils; is ever put in mind, ever puts himself in mind; at last does all but lose his purpose from his thoughts; yet still without recovering his peace of mind."—"Wilhelm Meister," IV., 13.

THE KING

BY
KARL ROSNER

TRANSLATED BY
AGNES BLAKE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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TO THE
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INTRODUCTION

By VISCOUNT HALDANE

KARL ROSNER'S short but famous historical novel appears in this volume in an English version. The translation is an excellent one and preserves much of Rosner's gift of describing phases of the mind with both delicacy and exactness. The book was soon recognized on the Continent as being a remarkable one. In Germany and Austria its sale has been enormous. The reason of this is more than its mere literary quality. What has made the narrative so generally popular is that the German people seem to have recognized in the picture painted by Rosner a portrait of William the Second that is for them true to life.

The portrait offered to us is that of the late Emperor as he was during the decisive days of the summer of 1918. Hindenburg and Ludendorff had devised and were executing what seemed to them a blow against the allies as secret as it was overwhelming. But the genius of Foch had divined their purpose. He withdrew from his forward positions and let the blow expend its force, mainly in vain. Then he advanced with tremendous swiftness, defending Rheims in his stride, and pouring on the German front and flanks masses of fresh troops.

The story told in these pages is that of the emotions of one who, believing himself to be accepted as the Supreme War Lord, found him-

self, respectfully but firmly, excluded from interference with their plans by the Great General Staff. He, the War Lord, begins gradually to realize that he does not really count as such, and that the army chiefs are the real rulers. He has the sense of deep responsibility if they should fail, and he knows the people of Germany will, as he has always bade them do, look to him and to him alone, whatever the result. This causes him deep pain. If he could only die on the field it would be better than to retreat defeated and having disappointed his people. But even this he sees that the Generals will not permit to him. In the end he reviews his whole life. Never has he really been left free, or treated sincerely. Assurances were given to him of reliance on his divine authority, but that authority was never allowed scope. He has been hemmed in by those around him, who had a less deep sense than himself of what was due from him to God and to the people. It had always been so and it was so in these fateful hours in which he found himself powerless, with disaster staring him in the face and the God on whom he had relied as his inspiration no longer befriending him.

The tragedy is intense, and Rosner thinks of Hamlet, as he describes the unhappy figure. In reality there have been two faiths operative and yet inconsistent; that in a divine mission, and that in an inheritance of power and policy from Frederick the Great. Both were very real in the case of the Emperor. But reconcile them he never could, for they were in truth incapable of being reconciled. What Frederick accomplished for Prussia, even in the old days in the face of the great difficulties and uncertainties, had been accomplished by a man of single and undivided purpose, unhampered by any sense of other duties. The world, too, was different from what it had become,

and William the Second reflects that even Bismarck came to appear conscious that Prussia could only pursue the old policy if new and unceasing caution were exercised. For himself he had felt assured by his faith in the divine source of his mission as King of Prussia. But that mission he had never detached from the old policy. Had he been right, or had he misunderstood the Command of God! How well he had intended even towards those who were now the enemies surrounding him! How little he had been understood! How unreal his position in his own army had turned out to be!

These are the questions with which the King, in the days in which Rosner describes him, is shown as tormenting himself. Not a strong figure, but one for which one cannot but feel compassion. He did not make his own nature, nor did those about him counsel him wisely. Even the ground plan of the Great General Staff was based on what turned out to be a colossal military error. It took insufficient account of the implications of superior sea-power. The result was an effective blockade, and the ultimate weakening of the foundations of the German Army. None of these things were made clear to the Emperor, and yet he had accepted the fullest responsibility for their consequences.

In Count Czernin's book on "The World War" the author describes the position of the Emperor, I think accurately, and certainly in a way that accords with what is said by the author of this book. Czernin declares that "far more than the public imagined the Emperor was a driven rather than a driving factor. Fate seemed to have chosen him to expiate a sin which, if it exists at all, is not so much his as that of his country and his times. The Byzantine atmosphere in Germany was the ruin of William the Second; it enveloped him and clung to him like a creeper

to a tree. Accustomed from his youth to the subtle poison of flattery, at the head of one of the greatest and mightiest States in the world, possessing almost unlimited power, he succumbed to the fatal lot that awaits men who feel the earth recede from under their feet, and who begin to believe in their Divine semblance. He is expiating a crime which was not of his own making. He can take with him in his solitude the consolation that his only desire was for the best." The Emperor had many faults, but I think that he also possessed certain fine qualities. The paradox is how the faults and the virtues could co-exist in one individuality. That individuality was, needless to say, a highly complex one. What its characteristics were, and how it presented itself to those who studied it at close quarters, gives rise to a set of problems on which it appears to me that Rosner's deeply interesting work suggests sources of light.

THE KING

I

DRIZZLING rain, akin to a wet mist, has fallen throughout the grey hours of the forenoon. It gives a sense of chilliness to all things—throwing a dim veil across the distance,—lending an air of increased shabbiness, indigence and emptiness to the war-worn station of this small provincial town of Northern France.

The rails are clear—only at some considerable distance along the siding stand a couple of freight trains—gigantic trucks, worn shabby in ceaseless service and filled to overflow with rusting remnants of machinery: a tangled mass of iron representing scrapped parts by the thousand. There are open lorries upon which cower, as it were, broken-down, grim-looking monsters that have seemingly stiffened in death—their fools' motley besmirched with unsightly blotches of mud, and beside these are thousands of searchlights, shot to smithereens and a locomobile smashed to a senseless-looking mass—as though hit by the fist of some giant.

All is quiet: quiet but for the dim dull shudder drifting across from somewhere vaguely beyond—in space; increasing and decreasing pulsations which seem to lie at the back of this very stillness and which are no longer heard. The only actual sounds come from the telegraph office in the open entrance hall, where the click of the apparatus resembles the patter of fast-falling drops.—

And here in the entrance hall—along the wide strip constituting his domain, strides the Station Commandant clad in his best grey coat, a long row

of ribbons adorning his left breast—belted and be-helmeted—restless withal, as he strolls expectantly to and fro. Most martial is the appearance of the Commandant. The hands now folded behind his back have submitted to being squeezed into a pair of brand-new red-brown gloves. He thrusts the upper portion of his body slightly forward and feels a sense of annoyance at the sight of the fat captain, who—similarly in full war-paint—has just taken up his position near the entrance to the platform and is standing about half a pace in advance of his adjutant.—As the Station Commandant approaches he leisurely advances his right hand, raising it with a gracefully curved movement to the brim of his helmet:—the salute courteous! the while he inwardly comments:

“ Local Jack-ass! Climber! bound to turn up and make himself superfluous to get himself remembered! shoving himself in other people’s way. . . .” And the Town Commandant, returning the salute with a friendly smile, winks across to his adjutant, as much as to say:

“ Did you ever see anything like that! The mug will be meeting his trains in steel helmet and gas mask next—see if he doesn’t! ” Then, both gentlemen having come within close distance, they grasp each other’s hands with the utmost cordiality.

“ Soon due, I suppose? ”

“ In about five minutes—”

“ Then we’re on the eve, so to speak, of great events—? ”

The Station Commandant raises his eyebrows thoughtfully and significantly:

“ Good Lord!—one hears this, that and the other—then—er . . . why, we can gather something from the transports coming through—get a chance of putting two-and-two together, eh? but—after all—” and he ceased abruptly, allowed his eyes to wander out into space—across the head of his interlocutor and mentally enjoyed a vision of the envy and curiosity he has aroused in the other’s breast. Then—suddenly pulling himself together, he adds:

" But—there!—I must ask you to be good enough to excuse me . . . I've got any amount to see to . . . and well—duty's duty! "

Then to a couple of weary and hollow-cheeked militia-men, standing at the exit, the stocks of their rifles against their feet—he bellows:

" Ha!—can't as much as collect your bones together—eh? " while the stump of a cigarette which his falcon-eye has discovered somewhere on the asphalt is vigorously kicked across the parapet—

He responds with a rapid salute to a lieutenant of the Feldjäger, who bears a black portfolio of field reports; according the same recognition to the Commissioner of the Secret Military Police, who has up to now been responsible for the closed area outside the station—and again his thoughts go back to the man he has just left and he ruminates thus:

" Jolly tactless of him—what's he doing it for? why couldn't he stick at his command . . . ? "

But at this very moment one of his underlings appears before him, stiff and erect—as though shot out of the ground—and reports: then through the stillness comes the sound of a long-drawn whistle—subdued by reason of distance.

There are hasty and excited movements—men stiffen: heels click one against the other—shoulders are thrown back, necks drawn high: Even the comfortable rotundity below the waist-line of the Town Commandant seems to perceptibly diminish.

At the windows of the telegraph-room, the Army Medical Quarters, and the luggage office faces may be seen, faces full of curiosity as they peer out—just to catch a glimpse!—

Slowly, as though out of breath from its long and hurried run, the great engine pushes its way in—dripping oil, sweating steam, wet from the recent rain.

Hands fly up to helmets in salute. Motionless, as if carved in stone, their eyes fixed on vacancy, stand the gentlemen in the entrance hall of the station.

The long expanse of dark green carriages sways

gently past—there is the luggage van—the telegraph wagon—*then he—*

He is standing in readiness behind the plate-glass panel of the carriage door; a grey linen cover is drawn about his helmet, the grey cloak with its fur collar hangs across his shoulders.

The motion ceases—

Guards descend from the carriages, adjust the steps and stand at attention beside the open doors.

And as he steps down leisurely, the other carriages in the rear disgorge their human freight:—all is push and hurry—a regular mix-up of grey and jäger-green uniforms; a clinking and clanking of spurs, swords and sword-belts and leather gaiters: six—eight—ten officers, generals, adjutants bustle forward to where he stands—gather close . . . keep in touch!—And there are besides some half-dozen Leibjägers as well as orderlies with cloaks, and caps, with portfolios full of reports and maps.

For a moment he stands still—his right hand extended and resting on the Fokosch, on the little steel battle-axe with its black stock, a souvenir of those fights for the independence of Hungary and Galicia. His glance sweeps across the station-yard, away to the misty heights where, high above the gigantic, partially weather-worn walls, and beyond the broad tree-planted Bastion, stand the closely crowded houses—the huddled remains of an ancient and once fortified town.

Hitherto his advent here has been the signal for a devastating blow at the opponent—it has meant good fortune and a step forward towards the longed-for victory. Then, in those days of early Spring, prior to the stupendous attack on that far-flung front extending from Arras to La Fère, and later again—before those new advances across the Aisne—at the Marne. And now the greatest of all decisions is pending. . . .

The thick-set square tower of the church of St. Nicólas rises grey and indistinct from out a milk-white mist. . . .

The greatest of all decisions. . . .

And again—it has often happened so of late—some dark foreboding, tarrying for the space of a heart's beat—rises before him . . . a dark foreboding as to the immense issues at stake in this final struggle. If — if — it — should — this — time — miscarry?! . . . Neither the pictures nor the thoughts are clearly discernible—not to be clearly grasped—they are but dim and threatening—some stifling and impenetrable wave, like a dark and cruel mass, creeping nearer—nearer, dragging down and flooding. . . .

His throat seems to contract—his hand trembles and he shakes his head abruptly. With an impulse due to upsurging Will-power he banishes the thing—. He must not be faint-hearted, nor let such thoughts obtrude upon him now! He feels that in this hour firm faith must govern his heart: a faith that on this day shall lend its courage to thousands—courage to offer—and to lay down—their lives—

The thought stirs his emotions—and once again does his glance travel afar, to the dim distance where the old tower looms indistinctly amid a shoal of grey clouds: May it succeed—this time! May this venture lead to the long-desired end!

Behind him he hears the shuffling feet of the cortège, the subdued clatter of sword-sheaths . . . and the sense of their presence seems to come through to him as something inopportune—as a surprise—

He draws a long breath of the humid air: May God so give it!

His blood flows more calmly and his brow is unclouded. Erect and full of purpose he strides across the platform in advance of the others and in a few steps has reached the covered entrance.

Strong and enduring faith may be seen in the manly features of this mature and sunburnt countenance. With his hand raised to his helmet in greeting he passes by the assembled gentlemen—still waiting—set in their stark immobility: the all-important Town Commandant, the little lieutenant with the shot-away lung, the Station Commandant,

the Feldjäger . . . and the two militia-men, for whom he has a friendly nod.

And now he is gone.

In his rear the pushing and shoving starts anew : Generals and adjutants; the Staff Surgeon and the Prince; Leibjägers and Orderlies—fall in . . . keep close!

Outside, in the Square before the station, stand the grey cars—waiting. Around them, in a wide circle, stands the gaping and inquisitive crowd. Orderlies, militia-men, chauffeurs; slightly-wounded soldiers in their bandages and among them, Frenchmen, women and children. A few rapid words pass here and there—all is carried out quietly and without flurry. The King has already taken his seat and beckons to the slender, smooth-faced, boyish-looking young captain of the General Staff to occupy the vacant place on his left. The rest are still hurriedly seeking quarters: portfolios, cloaks and bags are getting shoved in anywhere. Then the doors are closed, the hooters hoot, engines whiz and the cars glide rapidly on their way.

Driven by the wind, the drizzling rain seems now more penetrating in its dampness. The Chief of the Medical Staff shivers and wraps the folds of his long silver-grey cycling cloak more closely about his slender person. The Prince tries to get his game-leg into position; his thoughts turn to the soft and delicate opossum-skin composing his fur cap—and he opines that it is “weather for a sow, actual sow-weather! here we are again—looking like so many drenched cats!”

The cars are now passing the greenery that surrounds the monument to the little Tambour Stroh—they go down the rue de Mons and then up the hill.

Down at the station the gentlemen have lapsed into mobility. A sense of oppressing suspense has been removed and a feeling of relief—such as comes from having solved a highly important matter in every way most excellently shows itself on the features of all concerned.

The Station Commandant contentedly draws off

those red-brown gloves. The local Chieftain, who has gradually become himself again, and whose central rotundity now reassumes its habitual proportions, observes cheerfully: "His Majesty looks fresh and well—when we come to remember that he's close on sixty—yes, sixty."

Then turning to his lieutenant— "Well, it's no use—we must get along . . . who knows what may not be waiting for us—and one's got to shoulder all the responsibility. . . ."

On the platform two gentlemen who have remained behind are walking up and down. Their steps are measured and even, though now and again they tread upon each other's feet. One, the Chamberlain, is wearing the uniform of a General; his ruddy face is that of a man who enjoys life to the utmost: The other is the Chief of the Civil Cabinet: a man of middle stature, and spare—with the clever face of a hard-worked official; a face bearing the old scars of many a students' fray.

An exceedingly youthful and fair-haired little captain of a Jäger regiment, looking ridiculously slick in his tight-fitting coat with the St. John's Cross sewn to it and with sleeves that are far too short, shakes hands somewhat patronizingly with the Feldjäger, indicating one of the carriages to him with a wave of his portfolio.

"Yes—yes! the Counsel of Legation is in the train right enough—but you must hurry up—it will be starting in another three minutes."

And three minutes later the dark green train starts on its journey again—swaying—undulating—as it pursues its way towards the Front.

II

THE cars drive through the iron gates on either side of which stand sentries. The wet gravel scrunched beneath the pressure of the rubber tyres as they rush through the long stretch of garden. Then halt before a small house built of red brick and yellow sandstone.

On the outer steps stands the Field-Marshal awaiting his Royal Master. Grey of aspect and plainly attired he stands in the now fitfully falling rain. The Star representing the highest military award—one, which for half-a-century has been bestowed on no other—hangs at his breast. Behind him, in the semi-darkness which obscures the entrance hall, stand some three or four officers. These seem, however, to be almost blotted out by reason of his towering stature.

Bareheaded, calmly, and without haste, this man over whose head some seventy years have passed, approaches his King—bows low, then draws himself to his full height again—a broad strong figure. It would seem as though this victor of historic battles said in his proud humility: “I serve you truly—with a faithfully-rendered duty!”

The face is colourless—almost pallid; in its appearance plain and primitive, as though hewn from the very bed-rock of Nature by some archaic force, and above it is a short-cropped thatch of iron-grey hair. There is a pervading sense of level, broad and almost cubic Will; Greatness and unswerving Justice lie in those features, which yet evince an unshakable control born of kindly understanding—and a sense of quiet calm derived from the experiences of Fate.

The King takes the small hand of this giant in

his own. He is full of restless anxiety. Through all those seemingly endless long hours in the train—and now again, during the silent drive—this is the moment for which he has been waiting—waiting and yearning. Oh—to see clearly!—For the others know nothing—nothing! and none but these two, now here together, see the Entirety—and know the Finality!—none but he—and this other one!

His face twitches: it is only by exercising the greatest control that he can force back the questions welling up to his lips. But he knows: “All eyes are on you now—guessing . . . guessing!” and with a proud shrinking, he thinks: “Don’t let them pry within your soul! Be an example of strong faith and courage!” and acting up to these thoughts he converses in bright and lively tones, with a few well-chosen words of cheerful greeting for those assembled. It is only the eyes that contradict his careless words, those eyes that seem to hover with uncertain and restless glance, as though nervously feeling and touching here and there—trying to fathom the close reserve of this other one—to pierce the cloak which shrouds that inner being—anxiously seeking to probe those depths. . . . Yet do they find no ingress. And now, while the others stand waiting—observant and listening—the eyes can only come up against this armour of calm, sure and even reserve.

Just for one moment, as the old giant gently proffers assistance, divesting his King of the fur wrapped about his shoulders, does he vouchsafe to give him silent support, as it were . . . a swift, warmhearted nod—a quiet, kindly glance. And these as much as convey to the other—racked and a-thirst for tidings: “We may hope . . . so God will—all will be well!”

The King feels a burden taken from him. This faithful support at the right moment acts as a tonic—and the knowledge buoys up his regal dignity. Then a warm impulse of gratitude welling up—becomes a wish—nay, even a vow—to shower

honours and favours upon this man, when once the end is gained. . . .

With a free step he strides in advance of this other one into the Council-room:—Now they are alone.

The Commander-in-Chief deals with matters of general importance— His quiet and thoughtful words flow forth in measured tones. Short, and compressed sentences follow one another, and the voice has a fatherly and at times almost surly sound, still with a certain undercurrent of kindly persuasion: “ The greatest moment attaches to the morale and the fighting capacity of the troops! No—they are not what they were—nor can this be expected at the close of the fourth year of the war. Yet, for all that—the old-service-men of to-day are still models in the matter of duty faithfully performed. Only with regard to what is now being brought up in the way of reserves there is much complaint—but no doubt we shall overcome this . . . if “ there be rain ” on our side now and again—we need not suppose that *they over there* have nothing but sunshine. . . . ”

The King nods a couple of times in evident agreement: most assuredly “ those over there ” have little enough to laugh at. He has seen protocols setting forth the statements made by prisoners—he has also seen letters which have been found . . . nevertheless he seems to be waiting—expectant, and he now interrupts the conversation:—

“ The Chief Quartermaster General? ”

“ He humbly begs Your Majesty to excuse him from attending until the lecture on the situation is desired. He is, as Your Majesty will readily understand, deeply engaged . . . for hours together he has been hanging about on the outskirts of the army—and—where the necessity has arisen—has visited the various divisions: is once more going through the particulars with the Chiefs—is, indeed, getting the very latest particulars and giving his final orders. . . . ”

But the King had raised his brows and his wide-

open blue eyes look away—past the Commander-in-Chief.

“ Naturally — yes — certainly, my dear Field-Marshal; all that is of the greatest importance—and in entire agreement with what I would wish. . . . ”

And yet, even while he is speaking, he tries in vain to combat a certain rising sense of disappointment and depression—a something that seems to enquire: “ Could he not have kept as much as a few moments free to give a welcome to me, his War Lord?—was this quite impossible? ”—And he seems to see the General before him, that overwhelming, tireless, pitiless Leader . . . gets an almost corporeal impression of him in that unapproachableness and stubborn sense of duty he so likes to assume in his King’s presence—for all the world like a suit of chilly armour: . . . sees it all, and says to himself—“ *He did not want to come!* He is giving me to understand that the last man in the division of attack is of greater worth in his eyes to-day than I am—”

The Commander-in-Chief is saying kindly: “ Your Majesty, my comrade is indeed overwhelmed to the last degree . . . yesterday he worked continuously till two a.m. and was at it again by seven this morning.” But the King stands at the window and the words seem to reach him from afar—and through the deep bitterness of his mind wells up the thought:— “ No effort of mine—no distinctions have brought him nearer to me—there has been no winning him—this one: *just this one!* who is nevertheless so full of camaraderie for all his fellow-workers, down to the youngest officer of the General Staff—”

His glance sweeps across the garden, and rests on the green-house, before the open door of which a little French boy of some five years old is squatting on the ground. Shabby, stunted, and pale: he is playing with the broken crocks of some flower-pots and—as he builds—they continuously tumble down again beneath his hands. The child is accompanying

his play by singing in a monotonous voice: it is one of those despairing children's songs which in these times, coming from no-one-knows-whence, are yet on the lips of the poor throughout the land:—

“ Malheur la guerre,
Papa la guerre,
Maman malade,
Nix pomme-de-terre,
Toujours militair,
Malheur de guerre. . . .”

And a stark, unescapable sorrow falls on the King: *Malheur de guerre*— He sees the homelands: the hunger-stricken and emaciated faces—the wasting fields, putting forth, as it were, their last efforts—sees poor Europe in her distress—from end to end—harried to death . . . and hears on all sides the chorus of Hopelessness breaking from voices young, mature and old—from all the same miserable refrain: *malheur de guerre. . . .*”

His throat contracts and the hot blood rises to his temples. He moves his head—turning round abruptly, so hastily that the little gold tassels ornamenting the cords of his uniform tinkle against the Star upon his breast. His voice is rough—repressed—dry: his sentences short and sharp: they come from his mouth like blows, like hard and compelling strokes striking on the stillness:

“ We must get to the end of it all this time, my dear Field-Marshal, we must, we must. . . . Only think of the country—of the Parties in Vienna—in Sofia . . . I am daily assailed by the people at the Foreign Office—they point to collapse and confusion—and God only knows what! ”

The great burly man nods gently—his deep-set eyes rest on the King and he murmurs a few words in kindly agreement.

“ Yes, yes—of course; but times are always bitterly hard when there are pauses like this between the big blows. However—those who are not permitted to have a look at the cards should have some patience . . . they should possess themselves,

and wait while everything here is maturing . . . nearing, as it were, the very threshold of decisive events. Matters may, of course, not be quite so far yet—nevertheless, what our human strength can accomplish has faithfully and dutifully been done. We must rest assured in the strength of our just cause—in our power—our faith in the Almighty, in Whose Hands we rest. . . .”

There was something almost comforting in this homely warmth—in this steadfast and honest piety, and the King’s confidence returns under the influence of these persuasive words.

It has ceased raining.

They walk through the garden towards the wrought-iron gates: in front is the King with the Commander-in-Chief; in their rear and forming small groups, come the gentlemen in attendance and a few officers of the General Staff. Steps scrunch across the damp gravel; leather gaiters creak, there is a subdued rattle of swords.

The carefully-groomed Staff Surgeon,—who, already while waiting at the house—has been making long and vain attempts at interesting the lanky Guardsman-adjutant in the obvious inadequacy of atomistic metaphysics, as opposed to pantheistic monism, is now eagerly intent on following up the thread of his discourse. This, however, is not easy—for the Major’s strides are like those of a giant, while the medical officer’s gait is of the mincing kind, and distinguished for its graceful swinging movement from the hips as he places each foot before the other—thus making it a difficult matter to keep step.

“You will at all events agree with me that material metaphysics—in accepting the atom as the absolute principle of the Universe—should at the same time be required to furnish us with a complete analysis as to its entity . . . ?”

The Guardsman nods with ready concurrence: *he* was not going to argue the matter anyway! “Agree with you, my dear Professor? why of course! why not?” And his thoughts go back over

some twenty-five years to that funny chap of a Civilian—the crammer they'd had in the First Division of the Head Academy for cadets, at Gross-Lichterfelde. Whoever had he been? Some Big Beast or other—and he used to talk just the very same sort of stuff—as to which no fellow could afterwards make head or tail . . . and then coming to an abrupt halt he stares for a second or two in front of him—hurriedly feels his pockets all over—no—there was nothing!

“Thunder!—What with this dashed philosophising—if I haven't gone and left His Majesty's cigarettes in the car! ” . . .

Close behind these limps the Prince accompanied by the youthful Staff Captain: the officer is inconspicuous, and constant duty has worn him down to very skin and bone.

The Prince is graciously pleased to make some enquiries:—

“And what may be the condition of the coverts in these parts? ” he asks.

“Can't say, Your Highness—we've no time here for anything of that sort.”

“Pity! ” muses the Prince— “Such an excellent diversion . . . when I've been doing a bit too much—well, there *are* of course such times!—and so we're to lunch with you gentlemen at the Casino? ”

“If so please Your Highness! ” . . .

The extended, straggling group is crossing the street slant-wise. From behind windows and hedges peer grey-clad soldiers, craning their necks.

““Looks keen enough—what? ” says one.

“Oh—man alive! what's he more than the rest of us?! ”

And the King salutes—salutes—salutes—striding onward with his head held high: the bronzed face with its look of command—with those deep-blue eyes seems here in the presence of the people to be the personification of courage and security. He is speaking to the Commander-in-Chief, telling him about something or other—about some particulars contained in the secret agents' latest reports: it

touches the growing dearth of tonnage over in England—the men watching him are to gain strength and confidence from his demeanour—they are to see that their King is filled with a steadfast Faith. . . .

And—as he talks on—he himself receives additional support from his own gaily-hued word-painting. He visualizes the blank despair at Lloyds and at the other Insurance Offices in the City of London; caught as they are in a continuous stream of disaster—the never-ending news of torpedoed vessels—coming on them daily—even hourly! He sees the docks of many a shipping centre—once busy and prosperous—now empty—forsaken—mere playgrounds for the children, with the grass sprouting up unhindered between the paving-stones—.

The quarters of the Department responsible for Army Operations: Plain and insignificant—a mere garden-villa, similar to the last one, but shut in by a close net-work of wires above and around.

And once more are there sentries posted at the gate-way.

But the flight of steps is void, though within the entrance-hall a passing officer, hurrying out of a side door, brings his heels together at sight of his King: one moment of petrification—and then he hurries on again. The King divests himself of cloak, helmet and sword.

Voices—clear and sharp in the distance—are either saying or repeating something they have heard—doing so with a curious distinctness. The whir of telephone-signals seems to drift in from all the surrounding apartments. The way leads upstairs to the first floor. Here one room leads out of the other—as below. One has a padded door and above it a small shield, bearing the number *seven*.

The Count, who follows last—behind the Colonel-General, and his comrades-in-arms—the Guardsman and the youthful Staff Captain—is confronted with the thought: “Can this be superstition? Always the same number: he had it at

Pless; at Kreuznach; at Spa—and now here again! seven—always seven!” and the Count falls to thinking of Wallenstein.

But the Commander-in-Chief has already opened the door and stands aside for the King to enter. A blaze of light floods the apartment—crude, hard and pitiless—A voice is speaking—sharp and throaty—pitched in a tone of command it seems to cut its way, so to speak, over the telephone:—

“So there’s nothing further to report to Michel? And he’s to start punctually at X plus three X ten—Very well, then, my dear Klewitz—and may you get across in safety!”

The General—while thus engaged in speaking—has risen from his armchair at the entrance of the King and his party: long hours of arduous work within doors have added bulk to his figure. He hangs up the receiver and advancing towards the King bows easily—as he takes the hand extended to him: his manner is respectful and correct—hardly that of the military expert—he might indeed be a man of the world welcoming some important guest.

“Your Majesty . . .”

“My dear General—! As is always the case—whenever I come—you are of course immersed in your work . . .” and he smiles—at first with faint constraint—then more freely and with increasing warmth.

“The Field-Marshal has been giving you away to me . . . you simply overload yourself with responsibilities. . . .”

The General is standing erect—his eye meets the eye of his King:

“Your Majesty, each one of us has to do his job to the very utmost limits of possibility—it is a mere matter of duty—only by so doing shall we manage to . . .”

And the King nods energetically. Something seems to disturb him—the sharp discordant light . . . the cutting tone of voice—and he glances in the direction of the Commander-in-Chief, as though to seek support in that quarter. Then his eyes wander

to the numerous and enormous maps of the Front: some mounted on rollers and suspended from supports reaching down from the ceiling; others spread out upon tables—and he feels a dim sense of inward depression: he thinks—“So like good old Hinzpeter—when I was a lad . . . all these same pedagogic phrases. . . .”

The General welcomes each man present with a firm shake of the hand. The telephone starts buzzing anew. He takes the receiver and speaks:

“Yes,—certainly—I will send for you then. And tell them at the Central Office to ring up room *five* until further notice—”

Then he turns to the King: “So—now we shall have peace and quiet. Does Your Majesty desire some brief delineation of the measures taken for the operations now pending? I take it that the Commander-in-Chief will have indicated the general lines . . . ?”

The King nods gravely: “Certainly, certainly . . . I am most desirous—” With a strong effort he seeks to put aside all minor disturbances and worries: he is full of animation—expectant and intent: he is to hear about this coming battle. . . .

He advances to the great map-table above which the midday light streams in through the big square uncurtained window—pale and pitiless. There is a sheen on the silver-grey waves of his thick, burnished hair, and the profile of the brow and clean-cut nose—the firm and purposeful mouth and chin are seen in bold relief. He gazes down on to the map with its intricate mass of blue and red lines proclaiming the fronts—with the armies and divisions marked off, and the indications pointing to the formations obtaining on both this side and the other. Then he draws his brows together and with a tremendous effort seeks once more to obtain a mental impression of this stupendous undertaking—this living, cruel and bloody, palpitating fact—taking place out there—with its counterfeit here . . . just a tiny space, with coloured lines and marks and numbers.

On his right—with his back turned to the window—stands the Field-Marshal. The outline of his powerful and angular figure—of his square head—are alone recognizable against the light. Quiet and steady—immovable, ready to hear and to speak—should his King so desire.

At the farther side of the table—confronting the King—stands the Quartermaster-General, waiting. Intent and business-like of aspect—his eye-glass fixed in his right eye: the soldier:—soldier all over. The face, formerly indicative of full habits, has become attenuated from countless days and nights of ceaseless, arduous labour; from the enormous load of the work involved—and his eyes now bent on the map are following the blue arrows which show the lines of march. As the map now lies before him the positions are reversed, so that gazing down at the red front he can almost feel himself to be one of the attacking Germans—one with them, throwing themselves against this wall. . . . Passions surge and the blood pulsates behind that weary brow—and he passes his hand rapidly across the moustache that fringes the firm, closed mouth . . . while he thinks:—"Oh—to be there! to be able to give one's life—in this great—last—best . . ."

The others form a group that contrasts with these three figures. To the left—one pace in the rear of the King—with eager eyes and craning his neck, stands the young Staff Officer—told off for special duty with His Majesty and now peering with intense interest across his Royal Master's shoulder. At the side of the table, opposite the Commander-in-Chief—attentive and soldierly stands the Colonel-General, a trifle bent at the knees and leaning with both hands on the sword he has stemmed against the floor: he raises his white head falcon-like as he listens attentively, and beside him—but at a respectful distance, stand the two attendant adjutants.

No sound is heard in the room.

The King has raised his glance for a second: a short cough—and the voice of the Quartermaster-General breaks in on the silence,—dissertation:—

The voice is harsh and dry, but knows no hesitation. It seems to combine word and deed as one whole: with a few short sentences—like blows from an axe—it has altered the aspect the map has born hitherto.

“The new attack purposes—in the first place—the isolation of Rheims and the immense wooded heights about that district. This terrain has been heavily fortified and entrenched by the enemy. We shall not make a direct attack. The new battle-line has a frontage of—roughly speaking—about one hundred and ten kilometres and the district of Rheims constitutes a gap, as it were, breaking the continuity . . .” and his hand dives forward with a fluttering movement—now here—now there, his extended fingers indicating the positions on the map.

“On the southern and the south-eastern fronts the armies of von Böhm are engaged—the lines, therefore, from about Château-Thierry to Dormans, and from Dormans to as far as Béthany, north of Rheims—The army of von Below extends from Béthany up to the course of the Suippes . . . and the right wing of von Einem’s army stretches from the Suippes to Massiges.—Detachments of von Böhm’s army—on the south front—cross the Marne at Château-Thierry, as also at Dormans, pushing in the direction of Epernay, along both sides of the river. The right wing will endeavour to maintain the direction towards the south-east, forming the flank defence for the attack against the west along the line towards Condé.”

His countenance is personified Will—and as he speaks, the hand—doubled, and resting on its knuckles pushes forward like some part of the attacking mass—pouncing, as it were, in the direction of the blue arrows. The hand knows neither hesitation nor delay—already it has seized upon and is holding another position. . . .

“The army of von Below pushes south: then swings round to the west and—pressing forward along the course of the Marne, joins hands with von Böhm’s advancing army. Von Einem’s army

presses south and thus—in its operations against the east—affords a defence in that quarter for the Central Field of Action.”

The words rolled on—telling of bodies of troops—of numbers and periods. Falling like the blows of a hammer and shaping the rough outline of the coming battle until they have forged an image of steel. And the King stands silent, his clenched hands stemmed against the map. He bites his nether lip. From time to time he raises his glance for a second and lets it rest on the General—on the flushed face, with its purposeful features working as the fateful sentences fall—and the force of that other one takes possession of him and tears him along in its train. . . . He follows each word—seizing on them with hungry greed—setting one beside the other—drawing conclusions—and, and with that prompt power of up-take with which he has been dowered—his imagination is already hurrying ahead to where looms the vision of his whole aim and endeavour. And—all the time he is dimly conscious of something lacking . . . some human element, the want of which separates his own nature from that of the General. He is unable to grasp it quite clearly, but he is sensible of some wavering reluctance against final submission to the stifling strength of this will; almost as though in so doing he might be losing somewhat of his own dignity.—And yet—at the same time he is filled with an almost envious sense of admiration—a regretful acknowledgment of this other’s vast superiority.—The General’s voice has ceased. There is dense silence.

The paper of the map crackles beneath the pressure of the King’s hands as he regains his full height again. Eager excitement is depicted in his face—now pale from the strain of concentrated attention. He is now completely within the military picture of the impending battle. He puts a few abrupt questions—apt and to the point, showing a sound comprehension for the crux of the problem.

Information on these points is given him by the General and the Field-Marshal. At length he nods

and there is again silence. His eyes pass over the map once more—carefully gathering the entire picture together, as it were, and stamping its impress firmly upon his keen memory so that it remains indelibly fixed—with all the names, the units of troops, the points of departure and their destinations. On the third finger of his right hand is the diamond surrounded with small rubies forming the Signum Christi: and it sparkles in the light as he retraces the lines along which the hand of the General had travelled with so powerful and sure—so possessive a gesture. . . . Victory . . . yes—this is Victory!—must be Victory!—and Peace!—God will give it so . . . cannot withhold it!—

His thoughts are swayed by the force of the emotions now possessing him—by the longings with which he is filled. To issue strong, unimpaired and honourably from the horrors of this war . . . this fateful war—forced upon him by envy and by greed—to go forward towards Peace once more—to defy these spiteful tricksters in London and in Paris—! For it is all to end with a strong German Peace, one wherein the Empire's wounds shall be healed beneath his hand and shall unfold a prosperity such as has never before been seen—! He can see the fulfilment near, in the intoxication of his hopes—He is profoundly moved.

He looks up, stretches his hand across the map and warmly grasps that of the General. He wishes him to know that he is with him—one in feeling—. Then, silently he presses the hand of the Field-Marshal. And—in an impulse of grateful emotion, while at the same time fully conscious of the importance of the moment, he thinks:—

“Even as the name of that splendid Helper is ever called to memory when that of the great victorious King is heard—so too, shall These Two be held in reverence whenever *my* name is mentioned. . . .”

The Commander-in-Chief is the first to slightly dash the ardour of the moment. Thoughtfully and quietly he observes:—

"Yes . . . and we have managed to get a good place of observation ready for to-night that Your Majesty may enjoy a sight of these big fireworks—"

The King motions to the young Staff Officer. There is a hurried rustling of maps—a noting of positions: north-east of Rheims, close to Ménil-Lépinçois, is the point . . . and the Colonel-General, approaching now, memorizes the bit of woodland.

The Field-Marshal repeats:—"Should it please Your Majesty—our simple lunch is timed for one o'clock in the Casino. . . . Those of our Staff who may be able to get away for a time will be present—"

The party disperses—there is hand-shaking with the General.

Should he possibly be able, he will dutifully put in an appearance at lunch: but—for the present—there still remains much to do. Again he bows: respectful and correct—hardly so much the military expert as the busy man of the world—taking leave of some distinguished guest. The Field-Marshal escorts his King.

The gentlemen on the suite attend below.

III

THE lunch is soon at an end: conversation lasts for a few moments longer over the cigarettes. The King is seated between the Commander-in-Chief and the First Quartermaster-General, who put in an appearance as they were just sitting down to table. On either side sit the Chiefs of the General Staff; the officers belonging to the divisions of operations — Generals — Colonels — Lieutenant-Colonels,

Majors, Captains—the very pick of them all! such heads! some finely drawn, some spare, others small, even here and there one that seems insignificant—yet all have faces such as bear the evidence of hard and unremitting work—of heavy responsibility. But at this moment their countenances betoken, too, a sense of joyful eagerness and each figure seems more smartly braced owing to the presence of this one to whom they have sworn the oath of a soldier's allegiance—who to them embodies the high personification of the honour of the German arms.

The King knows that the eyes of all are resting on him, and his consciousness is profoundly penetrated by this sense of inseparable union between him and them—a union cemented by a century of common thoughts and aims: Prussia and Hohenzollern—the strength and glory of the Empire! Prussians—German officers—and he, the first among them . . . their highest War Lord, and—by God's Grace—hereditary King. He senses the thought in all its uplifting force. Faith and confidence pour in on him from the presence of all these soldierly, yet quiet men—giving him strength. The desire—the urge—in this hour, which not one of them will ever forget, to say some helpful word rises in his mind, seeking expression. The light catches a little silver spoon lying on the table to his right—he needs but move his hand slightly farther forward to take it and rap gently against the plate . . . and already he seems to hear the sound of his voice rising clearly . . . a few strong pregnant sentences come to his mind while he is still nodding his concurrence as to matters being discussed by the Field-Marshal and the Chief of the Political Department. His blue eyes are probing into the distance—he raises and again lowers their lids, his thoughts are busy feeling—modelling—shaping amidst the recollections of a handful of words used by his great ancestor—Old Fritz.

“Comrades, between this day and to-morrow lies—in as far as we are able to tell—the dictum of the

World's History. May, therefore, each one of my officers in this hour of destiny bear himself as a brave man—as one who merits to fight in my army: do not humour the foe. . . .”

But at this point he senses with a certain uneasiness and misgiving that the eye of the Quartermaster-General, seated at his left, is on him: a furtive glance through his eyeglass . . . then he sinks his gaze and seems to wait—matter-of-fact and cool. And the King knows without the need to look that a slight touch of boredom is about the Quartermaster's mouth again, as though his thoughts ran:—“Now I wonder whether he—by right of precedence—is going to speak about it—” and the King feels as if he had been caught in the act! . . .

A feeling of resentment is in him: resentment against this man who is never unwise—who is at all times correct—aye, and he feels angered too, in face of his own impulse. He shakes his head—pushes these thoughts from him—and knows,—while sensing some slight irritation at his own quick deviation from his point—that, yes!—this man is right!

His cigarette has gone out—he lays it aside and taking another from his case lights it at the fusee the General has attentively provided. He has quickly taken up the broken thread of the conversation again, forces himself into his niche once more, talking and listening to what the others have to tell him—as to what the home industries may be capable of furnishing—about the happenings on the Asiatic fronts. Not a word more of that which is in his mind—in the minds of all present . . . of what is not absent from any, not for as much as the space of a heart's beat—that *to-night*—

Then without more ado he rises quickly. In a moment all is changed. There is pushing—scraping—movement—changes of position. The King holds the hands of his Chiefs in a firm grasp. Eyes meet—their glances deepen. Firm determination lies upon his features—he knows! Action is now a

matter for these alone—he can but wait and trust—may the Lord God grant His support—

And now, all at once, a woeful sense of loneliness comes over him—it is as if his own ready willing desire for sacrifice had been pushed aside—just here—on the eve of the final decision—The longing within his heart cries out for but one being—some warm-hearted being, who—without the need of many words—would yet be able to understand. His glance sweeps across the officers of his retinue, while eager hands are busying themselves—placing the fur wrap about his shoulders—attaching his sword, handing him his helmet . . . and his eye passing from one to another rests on none.—No.

On the flight of steps between the small and scanty oleander trees stand the men of the General Staff, forming a semi-circle, as the King departs. The open cars are ready waiting: a standard—the Black Eagle on a yellowish-orange field—flutters from the first one. Behind the kindly shelter of the stout all-powerful chauffeur stand two work-worn young Army Nursing Sisters, anxious, nervous—timid; garbed in their plain uniforms they wait shyly, holding in their reddened hands bunches of such flowers as their wretched little Hospital garden can furnish, and on their pale, weary features can be read how in these grim hours they yearn to show their King that deep and true veneration still is borne him.

They had fully intended to make Court curtsies—but these are utterly forgotten now that their eyes meet his. He takes their hands—accepts their flowers . . . and questions them. Both come from East Prussia—*East Prussia!* He thanks them, and his features brighten—home has greeted him! The flowers are—at his desire—placed in front of him, before the wind-screen, and looking back after the cars have started, his eyes seek those of the two girls again.—

Then Avesnes vanishes as the cars rush swiftly south—into the maze of war with its dishevelment and contradictions: its bewildering impressions—

each jostling the other, all crowding both sides of the road for hour after hour—

Fields in a state of magnificent cultivation—heavy with crops—and again untended acres over which trails the wild poppy showing patches of blood-red. Hutments, camps, places of storage: troops of prisoners in yellow khaki—in horizon blue—are working on the roads—along the railway-embankment, or quarrying stones. Burnt-out and tumble-down walls—once dwelling-places, now overgrown with weeds and vegetation running wild, last witnesses of some long-past fights which must have taken place now years ago—in that advance march. Little mounds with their crosses dot the meadowlands and the outskirts of the forest—even fringe the roadway:—

“Here rests ——” On . . . on! past grazing horses, past aerodromes, with their chequered tents; on past resting and moving columns. And in between, are the towns, hamlets, and villages: La Chapelle — Etréaupont — Vervins — Burelles—. Cowed, depressed, as though homeless upon their native soil, are the inhabitants. Four years have they now endured the bitterness of their down-trodden pride—their lack of freedom, yet nourished—even in this hopeless present—by some poor sparks of hope—and a line from Hamlet passes through the mind of the King—

“I eat the air, promise-crammed: you cannot feed capons so.”

Swiftly he dismisses it and looks out again on the moving changing scene, while he thinks:—

“And scattered everywhere—whither the eye can see—soldiers—and again—soldiers! grey-clad men from all parts of the Empire: from Brandenburg and Bavaria . . . from the Rhine and the sea-shores—” Outwardly one is almost exactly like the other: stiffly they stand, turning their heads with the same quick movement—or jerking their right hand aloft just as they have always been in the habit of doing when he has inspected them—passing along from man to man—shaking them by the hand and

enquiring as to place of birth, trade, the part they have taken in the action—and then distributing crosses—and as the car tears by he nods to them and salutes—salutes— A thought is worrying him:—if he could but see behind that uniformity of outer clothing—behind that mask of duty—see into the very hearts of the men! Know what all this talk means heard here and there—talk of insubordination, of disaffection—know how much of it may be really true—Know? !—there is a nervous hesitation and in the depths of his soul a repugnance against such final clarity—which might—who knows?—shatter all that now stands firm.

Only a few weeks ago he had sent the old Colonel-General on an expedition of enquiry:—he had gone from army to army, from corps to corps. He had been instructed to find out whatever he could at the Staffs and then to report. He had returned with the best impressions as to all he had seen and full of the most reassuring confidence. The King muses:—But still—during the entire course of his thirty years' service had his old Adjutant-General ever had other than the most quieting assurances for him?—

And again—while the panorama of the hills and farms and aerodromes and villages and hutments pass by—his thoughts reach out afar to the battle that is to take place between this and the next day: for its issue will be the answer to this question too.

IV

BOSMONT—It is five in the afternoon, and the King's suite is already at the appointed quarters—having arrived at the little out-of-the-way station some hours earlier.

On a side line of rails, skirting a cruelly neglected old orchard, through which runs a little stream,

stands the long stretch of dark green railway-carriages. A posse of sappers are at this moment busy camouflaging the carriage-tops with freshly-cut willows in order that they may escape the aviator's eye: they are also contriving some sort of rustic platform—sufficient to afford a dry passage across to the isolated carriage which stands across the ditch.

A little grey-haired gentleman, the capaciousness of whose worn-out captain's uniform gives him a shrunken and dried-up appearance, is imparting advice: timidly—friendly withal—and without laying much stress on its being attended to. The sappers listen—or don't—as they list, carrying on their labours in a quiet expert manner. Headmaster at the Aschaffenburg Gymnasium is the present captain's métier—in times of peace, but for the past five years his job has been that of local Commandant in this quiet village.

Not that there has been much to “command”—so far; only that some representative of authority is bound to be in readiness—and to-day comes suddenly the order that the Royal Quarters are to be pitched here and everything to be put in readiness.

He adjusts his gold-rimmed spectacles, smiles at the slick, pale-haired Jäger-captain, who with his green cap well at the back of his head, his hands behind his back and a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, is watching the progress of the work lazily—slightly ironically, and says:—“Precisely as it was in the case of Julius Cæsar—in the sixth book—*‘His constitutis rebus paulum supra eum locum facere pontem instituit.’*” And the youth looked past him, responding with a somewhat patronizing smile: he has caught something or other about “Paulus and Locus”—his eye glances over the darkened window-pane of the neighbouring carriage—“Possibly some ancient academic joke of the old gentleman's?” but he resents it all the same! “this perpetual Greek nonsense—such as not even a pig can understand.” Then, after a few moments, he salutes and turns away, seeking the company of

those other gentlemen who have remained behind with the train and who are now standing in groups, chatting beneath those decaying fruit trees: "The old Domini can get through his job by himself," he opines.

From the direction of the high road, no more than some two hundred paces away and running parallel with the park of the old Castle, between the trees and hedges, and which at this point crosses the rails, comes the husky sound of the hooter. It is followed almost instantly by the first of those grey and dust-covered cars. This halts—and the rest tear up breathlessly, so to speak, pausing behind their leader. The attendants spring down from their seats—doors are flung open.—The King. Before he has stepped to the ground the fuss and movement about him is in full swing. Slim, green-clad Leib-jägers seem to pour out of the train, they approach swiftly—gathering up rugs, furs; cloak—sword . . . while orderlies crowd about their masters as they leave the cars—busying themselves with the paraphernalia of map-cases, portfolios, helmets, swords and cloaks.—

Some of the gentlemen have left the orchard to approach the King: one is the Chamberlain, whose bright, dark and beady eyes glance from side to side, mustering everything to see if all is in order. Another is the gaunt, reflective Chief of the Civil Cabinet—and the third the graceful, elegant and ever-smiling Counsel of Legation, who—possibly owing to his greater degree of youthfulness—looks a trifle irresolute as he stands between them.

The remaining gentlemen draw themselves up in readiness to salute—then, reassuming their easy attitudes, make for the train . . . there may possibly be some news to be got from the party that has just rejoined them . . . possibly, too, there may be a chance of getting a cup of tea—at last.

Only the King remains a while in the glare of the sunlight, engaged in eager and lively conversation with his confidential officials. He feels what a boon

this is—what a relief—after the hours of painful introspective solitude he had indulged in during that long drive: the relief of being among those who are attached to him by ties of faithful service:—the Chamberlain, an old fellow-student and friend, ever since those far-off college-days at Bonn—and he senses dimly, yet without even caring to make the matter clear to himself—“those at Avesnes—the Field-Marshal and the General—they don’t want me about them now . . . it is with these here that I shall share this greatest venture now immediately before us. . . .”

A warm glow of geniality seems to suffuse his whole being: he is covered with the dust of the road—it lies upon his features, like a fine greyish-brown powder, on the hair about his temples and his eyes, but to this he pays no heed. All he cares for is to give vent to the strong desire to share with others what he takes to be good omens—share all that he himself has heard—repeat it to them . . . force back all rising doubt; derive strength from the sound of his own words—while—at the same time—he is conscious of the pleasure he enjoys as being the bearer of good tidings to these others, who—like himself—will doubtless have been racked with anxiety . . . to give . . . to bestow!

He seems more than usually animated: the pictures of all he recalls to his mind are enhanced in his eagerness to “make them live”—Hope turns to Certainty upon his lips; Possibility confronts him in the guise of Fulfilment. His own words once more strengthen his Faith—and his hand moves energetically, with swift, descriptive gestures:—

“It is absolutely certain that the gentlemen at Avesnes have prepared for all eventualities—down to the very smallest detail. And—the enemy knows *nothing* of the impending stroke—*absolutely nothing!*”

From the windows of the telegraph-wagon sound the ticks of the Hughes-apparatus. The keen young voice of the Staff Captain comes from somewhere or other:—

“ Be so good as to forward all messages at once to my compartment! ”

The Chamberlain passes a hurried glance along the train, then raises his hand—as though to respectfully invite caution. Then the little group moves a few paces farther away—to where the trees are denser. The King’s eyes radiate a deep blue from amidst his dust-covered face. The light penetrating through the gently-swaying shrivelled branches lies in pale patches, and draws tremulous lines of shadow about the men.

The King takes the arm of the Civil Service Chief:—

“ Do you know what they think?—The French—according to the reports of our agents—expect an attack upon the line from Amiens to Noyon, and a push towards Paris. While the English are staring at the Kemmel! So far the Front has been fairly quiet, and this ‘ so far ’ now means for the enemy *too late!* ”

His Excellency, who has torn a leaf from one of the apple trees, gazes at it with his short-sighted eyes and plucks it to pieces.

“ God grant that it may be so! ” he says quietly. And the King nods confidently at the young Counsel of Legation and feels convinced as to the happy issue—saying:—

“ Yes—dear Baron, what your Foreign Office Department has been unable to deal with we shall yet accomplish *here!* and we shall then find our customers ready enough for peace! ”

But the Counsel of Legation merely smiles, showing two rows of regular and faultless teeth: does it mean Agreement? Doubt? Scepticism? or—Embarrassment?—It may be that he hardly knew himself.

V.

IT is half an hour later.

The King has had his bath—gulped down some tea—seen his Staff Doctor.

No doubt the Medical Chief is right: the day has been surcharged with impressions and the coming night, out at the observation station, will demand both strength and energy. Rest is therefore imperative: an hour's sleep should act as a refresher.

So the King stretches himself at full length on the cool leather couch. At his feet on the rolled-up rug lies the black, over-indulged Dachshund. A scent of perfumed water is in the air and mingles with the pungent smell of the russia-leather. The dark green curtains of the sleeping compartment have been drawn close—no more than a dim, pale glimmer of waning daylight suffuses its small proportions. Here and there the light is caught and reflected in the cut-glass bowls and bottles upon the wash-handstand and flickers about the posts of the narrow brass bedstead.

All is still: no sounds but the shuffling of feet as they pass across the cinders about the railway-incline, scrunching to and fro, or again some half-blurred voices—undistinguishable words, and these slight distractions give him an almost pleasurable sensation . . . they are assurances of human presence.

He draws a deep breath. . . . Sleep—yes . . . could he but sleep! and motionless he lies with wide-open eyes staring into the dim twilight. He feels the tension—the strain upon his nerves . . . his very blood protests, as it were, against this enforced waiting . . . this having to wait—inactive.

His thoughts turn to the men who, all along the

front of attack, as well as on the various Staffs, must now be working feverishly—engaged in those final preparations for the onslaught. He thinks of the men now encamped in readiness, and of the posts whence the storming is to proceed—and these pictures—leaping up—follow each other in rapid succession as the daylight wanes.

He closes his eyes—his throat is dry—and once more he seems to see the little French boy—shabby, stunted and starved—sees him playing with the broken crocks and hears the weary, colourless child-voice:

" Malheur de guerre—papa de guerre—maman malade . . . "

and his mind moves along the same outgoing line of association as when in the forenoon he had stood beside the Field-Marshal—that vision of pathetic misery turning his mind homeward once more. And it seems as though from the far distance—a distance shunned because of the load of some uncommitted wrong—a hundred thousand faces, starving, silent and sorrow-laden, were raising their eyes to him; thousands of hungry, wretched and yearning eyes turned upon him—eyes from which he cannot escape—fixing him—holding him with their gaze, as though a very ocean of hundreds and thousands of pale and wasted arms—weak with want and heavy labour—were stretched towards him—appealing, supplicating, demanding: *Bring us Peace!*

And—in between these people—scattered here and there, as far as the eye can reach, are others—with fanatical, flaming eyes: who threaten him with hot words and menacing upraised fists: "*An end to slavery under the will of this Leader! enough!—should he and his be unable to accomplish, to end . . . then an end to him—a riddance of his power and that of all his line!*" . . .

And all at once he sees before him the pallid, pasty face of his cousin—Nicky; with that timid, vacant expression in his heavy, leaden eyes—and next—poor, dear Alex—and all the children. . . . He

senses the red horror of that wave of blood—rising, overwhelming, sweeping away both him and his throne—a man cheated and betrayed, none knowing where those brutes may have done him to death. He moves uneasily and a rush of feverish heat comes over him: with an effort he seeks to free himself from the vision. . . . “Murderers!” he cries to himself in an access of tremendous rage. . . . “Murderers and wretches!” and as though anxious for some escape from the horrors now gripping him—trying to fasten on him—he turns and clings to those matter-of-fact and comforting words spoken by the Field-Marshal: “Yet, for all that, the old-service men of to-day are still models in the matter of duty faithfully performed.” He listens, as it were, once more to the thoughtful utterance, to the rough rumbling cadence of the voice—recalls it—drawing strength from its assurances: of course—the army . . . as long as the army remained faithful to its duty . . . and he pursues the thought with a certain numbness of feeling—then starts abruptly . . . passing from this subconscious mood to one of impetuous passion: “Should he but achieve this for me! He and that other one! Ah, how I will reward them! High above all others will I raise them—and shower favours on them in that new Empire of Peace!” . . . His thoughts wander on—becoming more plastic, more akin to pictures—and they play around the question of honours and titles—of ranks and decorations . . . as he conjures up the dazzling commemoration scenes—which must coincide with the triumphant entry synchronizing with the occasion of the bestowal of the highest awards—at that moment of imposing accolades—when the foundations of the new Palace of Peace shall be laid. . . .

Then all of a sudden all these bright phantasies are blotted out—and every particle of light fades from his mind. A dark and shadowy recollection now invades his thoughts, reminding him once more of home. It stirs old, unhealed wounds, and sorrows, past and gone, are made to live again.

Bitterness awakening, surges up . . . the obdurate obstinacy of a heart whose pride has been wounded to the quick now rears itself:—"How I will show them—the fault-finders!—those who are always giving out that I cannot bear the presence of great men about me—cannot endure the celebrity of others! . . . with their falsehoods and their infamy—slandering me behind my back—ever since I parted with that *one*—had to—yes—*had to!* because of all he took upon himself! his provocations and the overbearing way in which he showed his open disdain for my dignity—as his King . . . even for my dignity as man—until things had become unbearable!"

Hot passions surge within the King's breast—the fingers of his right hand drum restlessly against the leather sofa. The little dog raises her head and touches his fevered skin with her cold nose. Mechanically he strokes the dog's smooth coat:—"Be quiet, Senta, quiet!"—and the small beast obediently stretches itself out on the rug again, while the King's thoughts continue circling their weary round.

Sleep?—Rest?—he turns the cushions over with an impetuous movement and presses his face against the cooler linen. He closes his eyes—and tries hard to think of only the one thing—of sleep and rest . . . but his brain still beats about the same question and refuses to dismiss it—indeed, it increases in strength. Great men?!—have there been any during these past twenty-five years? "Had there been but *one*, I'd have given his weight in gold!—and *now*—should this succeed—there will be these two!—*then* all the traducers shall just see whether or not I can tolerate great men and celebrities about me!—they shall see that I know how to honour and reward—!"

Then he thinks of those hours—three days after the great push forward in the Spring . . . on the Front from Arras to La Fère. . . . It was on the twenty-fourth of March—my God! not yet four months gone! It was then that he had himself

pinned the Blücher Cross, with its encircling gold rim, to the breast of the Field-Marshal—begging him that he would—as a favour—take his first drive across the battle-field seated at his—the King’s—side. How clearly he can now visualize that moment: the Field-Marshal stepping into the car beside him: it was at Avesnes, in front of the same red house—at the foot of the same little flight of steps—and surrounded by the officials of the General Staff—by those in attendance and by the soldiers. And he, the King, had not rested until the Field-Marshal had consented to take the seat at his side—and had himself spread the rug across his knees—rendering all these attentions purposely, so that those around might bear witness with their own eyes—making known to all how he, the King, delighted to honour his foremost subject and soldier!

And then—that drive across the regained ground! First tearing to Cambrai; then forcing their passage, so to speak, through this hapless town—wrecked by the fire of the enemy as well as by his own troops: through downtrodden and deserted defences and wire entanglements—through cruelly devastated villages—Hour after hour!—And then—wherever the car with its fluttering Standard halted—passed—or attempted to make its way . . . the same pressing forward—joy and shouts of exultation from the jubilant soldiery! all drunk with the ecstasy of this victorious day:—“The King!—the Field-Marshal!” For again and again he had drawn their attention to the heavy, plethoric, grey-haired man at his side—doing so with conscious humility—aye, and with proud satisfaction—whenever those grey-clad, dust-covered men, crowding the heavy lorries that came lurching and floundering along—over many a deep rent and rut,—raised their heads and craned their necks to see: and when the bent and battered men of the labour columns, plodding along the dilapidated roads, halted—trying painfully to straighten their bodies, as though unwont to such an attitude—and stared at them with red per-

spiring faces—as though beholding beings from some other world!—

The wonder and the tumult of that entire drive now pass before the King in living pictures as he gives himself up to the memories of those hours . . . and their intoxication—quickenings his pulse—beats—transform the past into the present, causing his heart to beat more rapidly as those moments of pity and of pleasure rise up before his soul. . . . Expectation—and the tremulous tension of final forces—even as to-day—after months of preparation—of laborious work bent to the one end—to that of the decisive victory! Will it succeed?!—All, all is staked upon this one card! He knows how many are the eyes now turned on him,—the pivot of their strength: how many thousands of eyes, all seeking to find their faith, support and confidence in what they may see written on his features—seeking, as it were, to drink from his lips. And all the time this clinging to the cheerful mask, to the careless word—a careful display of royal imperturbability—while the dark fears possessing his soul neither cease nor rest. Then in the solitude of these dark hours, when display and conventions have been cast aside—along with the uniform that lies across the chair—with its cords and its decorations—feeling dares to assert itself and in despairing supplication clamours to One alone:—“ Oh, Thou—Who hast favoured me above many! before Thee do I kneel in the dust, O Lord! do not forsake me—for in Thee is my hope of succour! ” . . .

Three such days—while the troops wrestle and bleed and the air is rent with the almost insupportable din of the guns. Three days and three nights—bringing fear—hope—sorrow—and doubt. Then partial successes are reported, but it remains at that—so that nothing had practically been attained. Endless trains—bearing red crosses—with white-covered stretchers behind their doors, crawling back along the rails . . . mud-coated motors spitting forth their bleeding charges of wounded—men rescued from that hell of fire. And then—with all this, only

the hard and cruel waiting—and again the waiting—without daring to show that his nerves are near the breaking-point amid all this agony! Nerves, as to which these others know nothing! not even the General, who with obdurate and pursed-up lips—his plethoric head sunk deep between his shoulders—studying his maps all through the day and night; thrusting aside all enquiries, all questions, with:—“Even successes require time in which to mature honestly!”—But then—that fourth day . . . when all is lying open to the gaze—when the blood-red tatters of this veil gape wide—and, amid the shuddering horrors of smoke and poison—death and fire, Victory has bared its face . . . then the old soldier—unbending—acknowledges his past suspense with a look reminiscent of the fine old Prussian barrack-yard type on his beaming features as he says:—“Now the whole caboodle has started sliding *over there!*” . . .

The King stares out into the darkness with wide-open eyes. His teeth are gnawing at his nether lip—the blood surges in his temples. He is seeing pictures—is on that drive once more where—above and beyond the horrors and the pity-provoking scenes—there is all the excitement and heat of a jubilant victory—

He sees the weird and angular and ruined remains of Masnière—like skeletons—pointing heavenward . . . expostulating: he seems again to experience the sideward lurch of the car as it crosses the hastily improvised bridge the Sappers have thrown across the Scheldt Canal—stares down again into the turbid waters—choked with dead men—with disembowelled horses: notes how the bridge is resting on supports formed of gay-hued, quaint-looking English tanks that had fallen over the parapet during the course of the fight. And these pictures increase in vividness—reaching almost to the point of madness as he visualizes the desert of La Pavé—this indescribable hell of wire entanglements—of shattered trenches—of points of attack and resistance, whence the Germans, pressing onward, had passed to victory. And

then—Gouzeaucourt—the eminence with the little English graveyard—where to the last moment the gravestones had served as tables on which to dress men's wounds . . . that little graveyard, with its far-flung view across the battle-field: and on—to the hilly and undulating land outstretched beneath the clear blue sky of a Spring day, and caressed by the breath of gentle winds,—on—to the up-rent roads and the dismantled tanks—the broken *débris* of guns—limber—harness and accoutrements—all lying amidst that blood-stained harvest of grey and yellow-brown forms—in curious huddled postures . . . motionless. And over all this chaos of castaway clothing, arms and implements—the German reinforcements creep westward: men on foot and munition columns; batteries and bridge-builders; then again—more troops.—

There had been victory *then*—and now, might not the next few days reveal victory once more—final and decisive?! And his thoughts now turn to that push during the last days of May: He was to have retaken the heights of the Chemin des Dames for us then over the heights and across the Aisne—beyond Vesle and Ourcq—and through the glorious Isle de France, right up to the Marne!—and now—? Why should not this initial plan—the occupation of both sides of the river—of that vantage-point, Rheims—be another forerunner of results such as shall lead to an undreamed-of final victory?—

An attack such as might again—of its very own force—propel the storming army across the river—westward . . . drawing the wide circle more tightly still about the heart of France—obliging her?—The King's blood surges . . . he can hear its rushing . . . Paris—! He sees the General's hand in front of him—that firm and pitiless hand: sees it as he did during the lecture in the bare room at Avésnes—the hand that moved now here, now there—while the voice fell like the blows of an axe upon hills and positions—splitting up the set and fixed aspect of the Front—pausing for one second, with bent fingers—

like some beast of prey, ready to pounce—then advancing—taking . . . Paris—!

A host of anxious longings—of anticipatory satisfaction—flood in upon him, circle around that word—take shape and form: rise in a whirl of presentiments and pictures—all seeking their expression within one Unity. And at the same time he is aware of something dim and indistinct warning him not to give way to these tempting fancies—something amounting almost to fear—hesitation—withstanding—the final causes of which are hidden from his consciousness. Superstition—a something urges him “not to name” the thing!—as if this “naming”—thinking—reflecting—were contrary to those active, spell-weaving Powers, now quiescent—who if disturbed might arise and turn—and again he shakes his head, seeking with short, quick movements to push all this away. But the thoughts and the pictures return again and again—they buzz about him like gnats—intruders that will not be denied, finding secret ingress and stealing into his brain—Paris!—

Should it succeed!—After a war forced on him by a world of enemies who with lying treachery now sought to lay the blame at his door! To seal so historic a victory with such a symbol as the crushing downfall of this oft-conquered and revengeful enemy—a felling of God’s Judgment on all the enemies and miscreants who had brought this appalling misery on the world:—a recognition by Providence Itself of the spotless purity of his desires—of his actions. . . . To stand once more where forty-eight years ago had stood that great and passionately revered ancestor—creating the Unity of the Empire, thus earning for his name a deathless memory. It seems to him that not until this has been accomplished shall he be in a position to emerge from the broad and restful shadow that has lain over this heritage that is his—that shadow which has been thrown across these past thirty years—and be able to stand forth in his own true light—Not till this dream comes true!—What balm to his soul would it not be!—balm for many a thousand wounds! and—in the face of the entire

world a confutation of all those slanders brought against him by the misguided populace.—What a satisfaction for many a humility his pride has had to bear!—And then—how royally, how largeheartedly would he forgive and forget!—Pardoning the traducers at home as well as his enemies, crushed into submission across the frontiers!—

He feels as though then his life might be one of conciliation with respect to everything that had gone before—all those past agonies, the bitterness of which—with its consequent divisions and quarrels, had lived on; feels that a new start will have been made with this new and clean peace—and along this line of thought his senses quiet down. . . .

There is a slight sound as of gently moving steps—feet passing carefully over the coarse pebbles outside; they seem to come nearer, as if approaching the carriage. He raises his head—listening: he can just distinguish the voices of the Staff Doctor and his old serving-man; they are talking in hushed tones and he knows that the Philosopher is enquiring as to whether “His Majesty *really* is asleep?” and that old Schulz is saying—“Yes—for sure! been asleep for nearly an hour!” Then all is still again—

And the King continues to stare into the twilight—seeing out across space and time . . . into the past—

Sees back into his youth, poisoned by the hardness of a cold and unloving mother—sees the estrangement, the growing hatred that with increasing illness severed him from his father—and sees the shadow of the Giant—which falling on him with its overpowering weight came near to crushing his very manhood—

There is a faint knock at the door of the sleeping compartment—then another . . . at the foot of the leather sofa the dog has stirred.—Then, with a start, the King sits erect and is back in the present again: the warning taps have come as a happy relief. With an effort at steadying his will he thinks:—“I must maintain my belief—my confidence . . . must not

let these worries fasten on me again—going over old ground . . . raking up the past—becoming a prey to doubts and agonies! . . .”

Then he calls out:—“ Yes, Schulz! ” and his voice rings out clear and unconcerned.

So the ponderous old man, who has served his Royal Master for a lifetime, edges his way into the compartment and draws back the green window-curtains: and the evening light is soft and clear as it lies on the window-pane.

VI

THE King is seated in his work-compartment, in front of the big morocco-covered table and is turning over the leaves of the reports contained in a portfolio. He is trying to concentrate his attention; trying to put aside all thoughts connected with the hours now approaching—and all they may imply.

He has a pencil in his right hand and from time to time he makes some note on the margin of the reports—some reference to the contents of the documents: some denote agreement—others are in a form of enquiry—some again frankly critical, and then he signs the papers with his upright initial and that energetic underlining stroke.

Looking up—across the appointments of the writing-table and past the flower-filled vase which stands beside a dull-silver picture-frame, he can see where some of the gentlemen of his suite are standing among the fruit trees. There are the Major and the Prince—both intent on investigating a burrow at their feet; and then—there is the Colonel-General, who with a map in his hands, is talking earnestly to the Automobile officer—the latter, standing soldierly and erect before his superior officer . . . and the King says to himself:—

"Now that poor chap is to be held responsible for every tyre that may burst on to-night's drive!"—and he is about to put his head out of the window and give some jesting words of encouragement to poor Pannemann, yet—on second thoughts—he lets it be!

His eye roams on over the grass of the meadow—to the foliage of the willow trees—and along the hedges that fringe the little brook: the leaves take a silvery shimmer in the damp—"It must have been raining during the last few hours," he thinks: "good! that will have laid the dust on the roads."

Again a faint knock resounds—old Schulz has entered the compartment noiselessly and is drawing down the blinds, turning on the lights, gathering together the portfolios to take away with him. He has soon departed again and the hands of the little gold clock on the writing-table are pointing to half-past seven: how slowly the day passes . . . another five hours and more before—!

His eye now rests on the oblong picture in its silver frame: it is a portrait of the Queen in a close-fitting black dress and standing beside a little flower-decked table. A motherly kindness is in the eyes, the abundance of hair is a silvery-grey, the hands are lightly clasped. Some dim, vague thoughts seem to keep his eyes fixed on the picture: through all the photographer's work of retouching and "finishing" he can still trace the likeness to the original; and he sees the faint furrows, the lines of sorrowing upon that simple matronly face that has aged more rapidly than his: hears the warm voice, that—no matter what has befallen him during these past four decades—has yet always known how to understand—and how to forgive. Sees her—first as the beloved one—then, as a friend—and—later on, as the motherly companion. . . . And his glance still clings to the portrait for it seems to him as if those eyes—those good and deeply-experienced woman's eyes were now resting upon him. . . . Then a longing for home—for rest and security arises in him—a yearning for that one being in

whose presence he can dare to be at ease and free from all restraint even as his heart listeth. The only one to know his deep and secret sorrows—and his heart goes out to that simple womanly being who, after so dark and cold a youth, had been the first to give him love and warmth. . . .

His thoughts go back to the early days of his married life at Potsdam, and all that past seems all at once endowed with a new vitality—so clear—so present has it all become . . . he can even sense the sufferings of those days.

In the first place, there was his coming-of-age—and later on, he had been advanced to the rank of Colonel and Commander of his regiment of the Mounted Hussars: a soldier and on active service. He had gone about among the men on the Bornstedter Feld and all over that district, had frequented the Casino like other young officers: Conversation had, he remembers, mostly turned on Army matters, on manœuvres, horses, hunting—intermingled with “good stories” . . . and so things had gone on for a time—until they had become unendurable! . . . and he had then tried to get out of the purely military routine—had been anxious to get some “working knowledge” in other fields of activity. For the thought had ever been present in his mind that he would one day *be king*—and that he would then be responsible to both God and men. How passionately he had endeavoured to push his way out of those narrow confines then enclosing him—only to find on every side closed doors, jealously guarded . . . yet not by his grandfather, who, even at his advanced age had shown a kindly sense of understanding for the just desires of youth and who would gladly have forwarded them. No, he had been thwarted by the enmity and the cold opposition of his parents who, having waited twenty-five—nay, thirty years anxiously impatient for regal dignity, were now unwilling to see their position prejudiced by a Crown Prince—who knew too much and might be in a fair way of becoming too popular. In their eyes, indeed, his ardent desire for activities of a

wider scope; for some initiation into the duties of administration; some introductions into the questions of *la haute politique* was but one more sign of irresponsibility, of dissatisfaction; an evidence of instability, and ambitious restlessness! "It is your place to remain at Potsdam—with your regiment!"—Duty—and the Casino, therefore!—and after every attempt and proposal to break new ground, the same hot anger, the same hopeless bitterness—the resentment at such humiliating subjection. And then—none but this *one being* to whom he could unburden himself—this one, who in her selflessness, was ever ready with kindly words of peace—*she* . . .

His eyes are still resting on the portrait while his hand reaches out to the rack where stands his writing-paper: she shall know that in this hour—on this eve of momentous decisions—his thoughts turn towards her. Yet he hesitates—does not take up his pen.

Memories of bygone years are rushing upon his mind—one giving rise to another . . . they seem to range themselves side by side—like some panorama of the past—keeping him in its hold.—Youth.—

And—in his bitterness—he senses that it is not his own youth that now rises before him, but rather that of his children—and he sees himself standing beside his wife, actively concerned in the joys of her young motherhood: sees himself standing in the nursery among all those jolly little fellows . . . was there ever such uproarious fun and jollity as then! ? This had, indeed, meant "being young" himself—in all its unrestrained rough-and-tumble: and then again—years later, he calls to mind the nights with little "Sissy"—who ought to sleep—and won't! A spoilt little minx, who has taken it into her head that she must "do gymnastics" with Papa first—and that furthermore, it is *he* who is to "cover her up" . . . also to "hold her hand" until such time as she has fallen asleep. And so it came that Papa was called away from his writing-table each night to undertake this weighty business, ay, even looks

ahead—with joyful anticipation—to that quarter of an hour, finding in it some particle of the youth that was never his. No—he must put all this aside . . . for when he dwells on his own childhood . . . his own mother—and as he listens in the stillness to the promptings of his own breast he shakes his head in brooding bitterness. Mother?—a mere word—no more: it calls up the image of the cold and clever woman who had ever been of one mind with his father, and who when not too much engrossed in the manifold interests to which she was wont to devote her acute intelligence, would watch over him and his brother and sisters with the eye of some governess. How puritanical and hard she had appeared—this woman whose hands were busy enough where political memoranda were concerned, and who wrote so many letters to England—yet whose touch lacked both warmth and tenderness. This mother, who could speak so feelingly, so eloquently on politics and philosophy; on social problems and on questions of art—yet who had never had a word of motherly endearment for either him or the younger ones. And then again—from his seventh year onward—his mentor and tutor:—a good enough man, well-intentioned, and honestly concerned in the exercise of his duties: anxious that the heir to a throne—a future king should be initiated into all those matters fundamentally so requisite for a great and just Ruler—so we have building of character; training to self-restraint; and in self-knowledge—yet, for all that—the methods chosen by this good man conduce to the agony and joylessness of the child committed to his care. While other boys are enjoying life, it was for him to renounce his; while others played, he was bidden exercise his mind in edifying self-examination. His cousins, invited to a birthday feast, might stuff themselves with cake till they were bursting . . . while *he* must play the host—forsooth! press others to enjoy themselves, take care none is neglected, giving proof the while of his powers of self-abnegation by not taking as much as a morsel of

these dainties for his own plate. Well, he'd played his rôle gallantly enough . . . and had howled later on—when alone by himself! howled with all a child's sorrow and suffering. And with the cake, so had it been with his bread, which by the desire of his tutor, was given him for his breakfast without butter! So too, with the theatre—on journeys—even where his clothes were concerned . . . everything was denied him—in order that he should learn self-denial and abstemiousness—lest he should develop pretensions and be lacking in modesty. . . .

"Old Prussian simplicity"! this it was that was being drummed into him without ceasing, and now that he broods over this exaggerated form of a Spartan education, he feels as though during those years teeming with suppressed desire to break the bonds thus placed about him—the desire to enjoy all he had missed, had been deprived of, had accumulated—until the unslaked thirst for life had come to fill him doubly—trebly. . . .

And then he sees those years at the Gymnasium at Cassel—and the brief period of freedom at Bonn . . . and finds himself back once more at Potsdam—with his regiment—

The light over the writing-table annoys him with its glare . . . he turns it off abruptly and sits there in the dark, his head thrown well back—his hands grasping the arms of his chair. The hard pressure of the woodwork against the back of his neck seems cool—giving a kind of "pleasurable pain."

What was he thinking of?—oh, yes! of Potsdam: that time, when with every new day he sensed the maturing of his powers; the urgent intensity of his will and a yearning restlessness for recognition—a longing for some just appreciation of his personal abilities. A time when the humiliation of being thus thrust aside became increasingly difficult to bear.

The expression now on his face is set and bitter: the white and regular teeth are gnawing at the tight-drawn lips—and swayed by the emotions of those memories—a comparison arises in his mind:—

it is this—*Frederick William the First and the Crown Prince!* The Prince whom his father would not see because the former did not “conform” to the ideas of the latter . . . and who then went his own way—to stand in the present day “mountains high” above that father! The ever-recurring tragedy of the Hohenzollerns! The ever-old—yet always new lack of understanding in the representatives of a vanishing period for those who are about to fill the stage—the jealous ill-will of Age—in its withering laurels—for the fresh young blood with its own pulsations—and its right to fight for its own future. . . .

Once more he sees his father and feels the unhealed wounds—so deeply has the blow of that growing estrangement impinged upon his vivid memory. Nothing he does is right—each and everything, done, or left undone—is subjected to the same unchanging disapproval. Should he happen to call on his father in his military capacity, his appearance evokes the chill and insulting enquiry as to what particular uniform he may be wearing?—Should he be riding or on foot; talking or maintaining silence—he seems to sense that evident and purposely assumed smile of censure. He loses nerve—becomes uncertain under the weight of this intangible repulse . . . trying to flee from the shock thus being inflicted on his self-respect and pride. He attempts to defend himself: to defend that sacred right, for the honour due to his royal descent is here at stake—that which his tutor and all others have from his youth upward had never done impressing on his mind—why should this now be belittled and besmirched?—But that Will exceeds his power to overcome . . . and the difference remains.

He now becomes irresolute when associating with newcomers; becomes a prey to uncertainty where decision is requisite; the tendency is becoming almost morbid: and all the time he sees those cold, ironical, silent eyes, that dissipate his will-power—degrading him in his own estimation.

He goes on brooding—comparing himself with

others; with those few others with whom he is acquainted: with the young officers of his regiment, and in boyish helplessness he asks: "Am I really worse than they are?—more inexperienced—less dependable?" but he can find no answer—nothing but that uncertainty wherever he may turn for help. Yet, if these others are really so immeasurably his superiors, then he may at all events attempt to *seem* like them . . . and so he seeks their society more assiduously—affects their short, smart manner of speech—and hides his timidity, his uncertainty, beneath the sheltering cloak of a brave carelessness—is as ready as anyone else with an abruptly-felled criticism. Yet even in this new guise, he meets with no mercy at the hands of his father, indeed, the very change serves only to drive them further apart.

His mother does nothing to span the differences: she is ever at one with his father in all things—the willing echo of his fault-finding—as often as not, the prompter.

And then, the gulf deepens. As time goes on, his father no longer—even in the presence of strangers—can hide the aversion with which he regards him: to such an extent had that fell disease fastened on and embittered a life fraught with unfulfilled ambitions. The virility of the younger man now seems a challenge to the doomed father—who—at the last—could barely conceal those swift flashes of venomous hatred. "You are in health," they seemed to say—"You are in the ever-increasing vigour of your seven-and-twenty years . . . and I—my journey is at an end—I am mortally stricken!" and then, with possibly some subconscious urge of malice:—"You stand behind me—waiting only for my death—even as I once did . . . it is a part of our profession!—You will then reign for a generation—ascending at the flush of life, young and full of energy, the throne I had looked forward to for years, that throne, which ageing, and marked down by death, aye—dying, I may perhaps but claim for a few months—or weeks. Yet will *you* have the time to lay the foundations of

your own greatness, while I—with all my hopes and longings am but an old man—thrust aside . . . into the shade . . . to fade and to rot there! ”

Like some nightmare from which he can never entirely free himself, does this chill hatred of his father's weigh upon the younger man. And thus his thoughts roam back into that bitter past which had poisoned the early years of his manhood—a *nightmare*—he cannot rid himself of the word.—

A quick shadow passes across his brow while this thought obtrudes itself: “It was only last night that I dreamt of those eyes again—once more endured that humiliating anxiety and fear—the fear of a schoolboy going up for an exam.—just as men's past school exams. have a way of tormenting them through the rest of their lives! ” and he tries to put the dream together again—how did it hang together? oh yes!—it was so:—he was traducing me behind my back—doing so to those whose esteem I most desired—those whom I had to work with and whom I revered. To the Field-Marshal and the Quartermaster-General, and then when I appeared on the scene they all nudged each other and looked at me with their heads askew. . . . He had written letters about me—letters like warrants—just as at the time when he poisoned my relations with the old Chancellor owing to those evil, hateful words contained in that disgraceful letter—”

And with a start the King sits upright—his collar seems to have suddenly become too tight owing to the pressure of upsurging blood—no—no—he must not think of it . . . not think of it!—

He makes a strenuous effort to free himself from its oppression—his eyes fall on the paper before him . . . he turns on the light and seizes his pen—he will write to Dona. . . .

Yet he sits for several moments before the blank page, unable to collect himself—unable to find sufficient peace of mind to give her a coherent account of the past day's events—some inkling of all the next few hours may portend—or to tell her of

the faith and hope he feels as to an impending great victory.

The first few sentences seem uncertain and stumbling . . . then his words flow more freely and are soon giving bold descriptions, painting vivid pictures, which carry him away with them—as though on drifting waves. . . .

He has cast aside the furtive unrest, and page after page is covered with his clear upright Gothic characters, his mind filled with that great aim towards which Time is leading him onwards.—

VII

BEFORE the last lines are dry he has touched the bell.

“The Officer of the General Staff—”

He then adds the address and closes the envelope.

The door is opened noiselessly—a few steps—then a bringing together of heels, a slight clink of spurs—

The King turns with a swift good-humoured nod for the young Staff Captain, who is the bearer of maps and documents. His voice is husky from long silence, coupled with the difficulty of restraining his excitement: “Well?” he asks, with a forward thrust of the chin.

“The general situation has not changed since the morning, Your Majesty.”

“And as to the particulars?”

“Nothing of importance in this respect either, Your Majesty. The divisions of attack report a moderate amount of destructive fire near the usual boundaries—the preparations for ‘Michel’ are being put forward everywhere—according to plan. Does Your Majesty desire to hear the special Army Reports?”

“Thanks. . . .”

"Then may I venture to state that all arrangements have now been completed with respect to the place of observation constructed for Your Majesty's use to-night and that the Supreme Command has given orders for all Army Reports to be forwarded there, until otherwise instructed. Your Majesty will therefore be in a position to ascertain the first news as to the commencement of the 'Michel' attack during the course of the night."

The King nods: he looks at the small clock once more—it is nearly nine—so there is still half an hour to dinner-time. The fingers of his left hand are strumming restlessly on the writing-table. He feels reluctant to be left alone again. . . .

"What is the weather like?" he asks.

"Mild and pleasant, Your Majesty."

"Then get your cap and stick and we will take a turn before the evening meal. Down towards the water . . . along the meadows . . . and tell the Count to come too!"

"Very well, Your Majesty."

A few moments later the King is out in the summer night, breathing deep draughts of the dew-laden evening air.

About the banks of the stream stand willow-bushes, like silent sentinels past which the waters splash and gurgle on their way. The last shimmer of day still lingers about the heavens, and from somewhere about those heights come buzzing sounds—now nearer, now farther—some pilot on his way from the Front and seeking his destination.

Figures may also be seen here and there among the fruit trees: they rise: range themselves alongside of each other—stiff and erect, while hands fly to the brim of each cap. The King nods and walks on.

From the cooking-compartment—in the foremost part of the train—comes the sound of voices and laughter—some one is singing: for a moment the three men stand and listen. It is some sentimental song about home, sweethearts—and "Return."

The King strolls on between the Staff Captain and the Count. The desolate orchard now lies behind them and as far as the eye can see through the increasing dusk are bushes and meadow-land and beyond this nothing but the mysterious rushing and gurgling of the water and an occasional soft sigh—as it were—wafted towards them on the evening wind—a dull rumble in the air—distant firing.

The Count raises his hand, with a gesture in that direction:—"Were it not for that," he observes, "one might imagine one were at home, walking across the stubble with a gun under one's arm at sundown. . . ."

Then there is silence again, till the clear voice of the young Staff Captain breaks it with:—

"Yes! People at home seem to have no real conception of how peaceful all can be—no more than a few hours before the outbreak."

The King moves his head almost imperceptibly: no—he is not of the same mind and something about the fresh young voice he is usually so pleased to hear jars on him at this moment.

He listens to a faint twittering of birds—half sleepy chirps coming through the dark from amid the bushes; pauses then for a moment in his walk and says:—

"Do you know, Count, a thought of long ago has just come into my mind—it's about my 'first love.' It is odd, but all sorts of strange things about my youth have been passing through my head to-day; not that there was much that was pleasant about it all, either! But, just now another recollection cropped up quite suddenly—these things come and go, one hardly knows why or how—just at the moment when one is least expecting them . . ." and he pauses, yet knows there will be no reply. In the dusk he feels that the eyes of his companions are on him. With his cane he flicks aside the twigs that strew the path and continues:—

"It was in the year 1873, and I was just fourteen years of age—a mere lad . . . and—do you know who it was?—the Empress

Elizabeth!—Curious: it seems only like yesterday—so accurately can I remember every detail. I'd got through my exam. well in the *Unter-Secunda*, and as a reward I was allowed to accompany my parents on their visit to the International Exhibition at Vienna. As a matter of fact: it had been my grandfather who had put in his word for me. . . . Hinzpeter was distracted and made no end of a fuss—amusements were by no means part of his educational programme; but in the end he had to give in. Things were very different then to what they are to-day: for instance—any mention of '60' had to be avoided at Vienna—it was the 'skeleton in the cupboard' of which one did not speak. It was also safest to court obliviousness as to divisions of opinion which had obtained in '70'—as for the rest, people had begun to get accustomed to the fact that we existed—and that they would have to reckon with us. The parvenu Prussian-Germany would have to be received with civility—the first shoots of a treaty were germinating. At the same time, proud old Austro-Hungary was still inclined to look down very patronizingly—not to say with some secret disdain upon the young Empire. This attitude was—so to speak—'*spread on one's bread and butter*,' in spite of all external amiabilities. In fact, the entire Exhibition was, at bottom, no more than a manifesto—a glorification of the Austrian idea—I was at the time too young to either know or understand much about these sort of things . . . but that is how I see it now. For me the whole affair resolved itself into lovely days in the Wiener Wald; at Hetzendorf; and on the Prater, along with Crown Prince Rudolf, with whom I then formed a boy-friendship, one which lasted to the close of his life—"

The King pauses for a moment in thought and listens to the sounds in the distance. They seem to come in waves of long-drawn melancholy and weary tones—something like the chiming of hidden bells: it is the croaking of the bull-frogs down

by the water and it rises and falls in modulated undulations.

The King raises his cane and points over into the darkness—"That is supposed to be a sign of coming good weather," he says and then—striding on—and with a change of voice he continues:—

"To me everything was new and imposing:—my senses seemed to awaken—to blossom out in the balmy air of Vienna and among her people. This, too, was my first acquaintance with that hitherto undreamed-of and imposing pomp of Spanish Court etiquette, which throws as it were a kind of reflection of the mysticism of the Roman Catholic Church about the bearer of the crown of the Hapsburgs. And then—there was the Empress—one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. The first woman in whom I came to understand what heredity meant. She would have seemed unthinkable among any other surroundings . . . everything about her was queenly—though quite simple and natural, yet did she seem as a matter of course elevated above all others who might be around her. When she and my mother were walking in the Castle grounds at Schönbrunn, or in the Kaiser Park, I was permitted to carry her mantle . . . ladies wore 'mantles' then . . . and I fancied myself to be some page and was proud to perform this little knightly service. To pick up or to fetch anything for her caused me exquisite happiness. I remember that at that time I dreamed passionately—phantastically—of my rôle as 'her page'—and yet I was a regular boy . . . getting my first peep outside the schoolroom and she a woman of five-and-thirty: that, however, is but the recorded fact of maturer intelligence! for when I look back I find that my only conception of her then was that of some wondrous and noble apparition—quite independent of all Time and Period. Romantic?!—Yes, indeed! And perhaps it was just that about her that—owing to my dull, drab schoolroom years,—cast such a glamour over me. As if it were not often so, and that our methods of education do but defeat their

aims—leading to the very opposite—! In my own case everything was conducted on the most dreary, matter-of-fact and puritanical lines:—a realistic fulfilling of one's daily duties—with the result that I was, as it were, 'Virgin soil'—ready for all the wonders of Romance."

The Count nods gently; his glance rests furtively upon his Royal Master's downcast eyes, as he thinks:—

"And that is what he has remained for many a year—indeed, what he may possibly still be to-day!"

And then the voice beside him resumes its retrospect of what had been lived through so long ago.

"And what a horse-woman she was! the tales told of her solitary, venturesome feats seem almost incredible: and how she loves the poets. She made a perfect cult of Heinrich Heine—whose works had, of course, been forbidden me!—And they say, too, that she was one of the best fencers—and . . . with all that, she looked like a Saint Elizabeth—slender! as slender as a willow; with an oval girlish face, about which hovered at times a rather pensive smile. And then—what glorious hair!—dressed in the fashion of that day, with her pale-coloured silk dress, she seemed to me like one of those beautiful ladies of high degree to be met with in the German Legends of Chivalry."—And the King ceased: then, after a few paces, he said abruptly:—

"I don't know how long it may be since I last thought of these things: but I think that the last time must have been at Corfu—that she too loved so much. . . ."

Corfu . . . and his thoughts—impinging here—now take a fresh direction. He thinks of the happy Spring days spent on the island amid its wealth of flowers. Sees Achilleion—the park—the site of his archæological finds—sees Goetz's gigantic Achilles . . . and his brow assumes a sterner air. Vanished are all those gayer pictures of the past. There too are now the French—or, maybe the English . . . there too, has War slain Peace! Who knows what

may be left of that lovely retreat—a Place-in-the-sun, set amid Greek waters.—

“We will turn,” he says—and he retraces his steps along the meadow, walking between the two tall, slender men in the now dense darkness of the night.

In the heights above him the rumbling continues—there is the sound of distant firing. The bell-like chorus of the bull-frogs becomes dim and ceases.

The pale lights of the train are now in sight, and the King speaks of the coming battle—and of his faith and his hopes.—

VIII

THE King is seated among his gentlemen at the long narrow table in the dining-saloon.

The lights studding the ceiling shed their brightness on the double row of men below; it is reflected in the silver and the crystal of the dinner-ware; in the epaulettes, the breast-cords and the orders that decorate the grey and the grey-green coats.

The light and unpretentious meal is soon finished. The King is a small eater and his requirements are soon satisfied. Those who do not wish to be left behind have therefore to be speedy—“join up”—“keep in line”—even here!—so knives and forks are clinking—jaws are working—and the Colonel-General, taking a slice of the roast, gives an encouraging nod to the Staff Captain, seated at his right, as much as to say: “Mind you lay a good foundation—a night such as we are going to have out in the open needs something to go upon—and—how long His Majesty is likely to stop out there—lies with God! who knows when we shall get another meal!”

And in the rear of the gentlemen move the Leibjäger in their tight-fitting dark green uniforms—passing to and fro with noiseless tread across the carpet: taking one silver plate and replacing it by another.

The conversation is disconnected and confined to small groups. Voices are subdued and cease entirely when that of the King is heard. He is seated at the centre of the table, between the quite unmilitary-looking and corpulent Chief of the War Cabinet and the Chief of the Civil Cabinet, but for the present he is addressing no more than a few words to his anxious-looking Excellency upon his right—to the Chamberlain—or to the Admiral seated opposite to him. Mere unimportant remarks about his refreshing evening stroll down by the water; about the impression the drive from Avesnes had made on him. It all sounds particularly meaningless—as though advanced by way of a sort of barrier between himself and that which remains unspoken—though hovering on his lips.

And now the meal is over; the table-cloth has been removed and heavy bronze ash-trays and lighters occupy its place, while the big silver cigarette-box is being handed round.

The Leibjäger have brought the newspapers—the latest editions to reach this place: there is the *Cologne Gazette*; the *Cologne People's Paper*; the *Frankfurter*; the *Rhenish-Westphalian* . . . then the attendants withdraw and the King is alone with his gentlemen.

He puts on his smoked, horn-rimmed spectacles and dips into the papers; skims the reports as to the enemy armies; and the special wires. Around him the others are reading, listening, smoking, chatting in undertones. On the opposite side of the table where sits the Court-Marshal, with the Prince next to him—and beside the Prince, the Counsel of Legation, flanked by the little Captain of Jägers, there is some subdued whispering and laughter. For a moment the King listens, without looking up: the little Captain is speaking:—

"Well, as I was saying—when I'd set up my machine-gun, and got the thing properly charged and ready—well—I can assure you, Baron—those chaps of mine—well, there wasn't a dry eye . . ."

The Chief of the Civil Cabinet blinked across short-sightedly and his thin-lipped, ironical mouth has a queer smile about it as he thinks:

"Poor chap! he's got a bit too much to say about those six weeks he put in on the Front, now four years ago."

The King has glanced through one leading article and is now reading the second. The evident differences, which, like some chasm, seem to be dividing the masses at home, cry aloud to him . . . to think that in these days of crucial importance, days fraught with a magnitude of imminent and far-reaching decisions, they should yet seem incapable of rising to anything like National Solidarity and Union.

The People—the Reichstag—the Press:—each and all torn asunder in the suicidal way—

Then he thinks:—to bridge over all these internal differences by a Victory! to be able to give all these parties—now lost in their purblindness and false pride—to give them the great aim and ideal of being Germans!—Germans, who in a world of enemies, yet stood their ground, winning through, victoriously-triumphant—and who, as victors of the world, should generously extend their hands, ready to restore and re-build—

He pushes the newspapers aside, placing his spectacles upon them:—Quarrels and bickerings: unworthy of this hour. Yet—to-morrow they may have been swept aside by events of historical importance!

Nervously he rubs one hand against the other. The Chamberlain sitting opposite, clears his throat discreetly, glancing anxiously to either side with those dark eyes of his in which still flickers the blood of his French emigrant forbears. Then the Admiral at his side leisurely draws a wireless message from his pocket: he had been waiting for the

suitable moment. His morose, owl-like countenance is immovable—but he raises and droops his eyelids slowly as his discourse proceeds, in an even, monotonous tone—yet what is the gist of the words issuing from that narrow, lipless slit of a mouth—be it depressing, or edifying—few are in a position to gather:—

“The ‘U’-boat flotilla off Flanders again reports that it has sunk twenty-four thousand tons: two vessels together—and probably carrying munitions—have been separated from their escort; if things go on the same, the statistics for this month . . .”

The King nods; he hears this every day—with certain unappreciable variation: So to-day it has been twenty-four thousand tons: his eye turns to the clock on the narrow side of the compartment: another good hour before it is time to enter the cars.

His glance now rests on the Prince and the Counsel of Legation who, dropping the discreet tone in which their conversation has hitherto been couched, are now with some difficulty repressing their evident merriment—and he asks absent-mindedly: “What may be the joke?”

The Baron beams, exhibiting all his brilliant teeth:—

“His Serene Highness, Your Majesty, is giving us all the particulars of the preparations he has made for his toilet—presumably in anticipation of the entry into Paris. . . .”

The Prince tugs at his scanty dust-coloured moustache, the ends of which hang down over the corners of his mouth, while he chuckles with evident pleasure in his flat, glassy, Kalmuck-eyes, and observes: “Why—there! Your Majesty—the Baron’s been and given me away! I just got a Baedeker of Paris and a few other things together—in readiness. . . .”

The King nods and gives a nervous smile: he takes a cigarette from the tray near by and turns towards the other end of the table.

A heated discussion is in progress there as to *who*

the wife of a certain Captain of Dragoons had been before her marriage.

The King gets his light from the good-humoured corpulent Military Cabinet's Chief, and thinks *Paris—Paris!* But no: he *must not* think of it—not even name it! yet his mind continues to grope on touching the same theme: “What is it about the word that disturbs me?” he thinks: “Was I not brooding on it myself this afternoon—dwelling on the possibilities—? Is it superstition? Nonsense!”

And he now recalls to mind His Serene Highness's impudent, and yet set, smile, with something of the clown about his smug, undignified bid for applause—and he senses a sudden sickening disgust:

“Jackanapes!” he thinks, throwing his head back and sending the smoke of his cigarette upwards in great puffs: then:—“*Quod licet Jovis . . .*”

And at these words, his brain—ever reverberating to the associations of inner and outward sensations, is filled with the desire to place on record in some worthy manner the sum total of these feelings—these longings which the time of enforced waiting has engendered in his breast.

Away with the figged-out war recollections of the little Jäger Captain . . . ! away with the miserable Muscovite jokes of the Silesian Magnate—and with the idiotic pedigree respecting the Major's ancestors!—It is for him to sound a worthier note. He feels it indeed to be his proud duty at this final hour—which no man now present will ever forget—to confide to, to share with them, his heart-searchings and his desires. . . .

He glances at the journals and his voice, becoming fuller, draws the attention of the others towards him as he turns to the Chamberlain and the Chief of the Civil Cabinet:—

“Even our aim and object in this way would seem to be better known to these newspaper-office wise-acres—be they of the Right or of the Left—than to either the Commander-in-Chief, or the Imperial Chancellor. At one moment they talk of annex-

ation as far as the line of the Maas—then of relinquishing Alsace-Lorraine—! We are supposed to be carrying on a war of defence! We wish to live out our future undisturbed and unhindered—! that is all! but—over and above that—our greatest war-aim should be to arrive at some basis of mutual understanding, such as shall rule out the possibility of any such catastrophe as the present calamitous war ever coming over Europe again—”

The Chamberlain nods emphatically: his dark eyes move rapidly and the clever plethoric Bourbon face is full of agreement and readiness to concur on this basis:—“ Why, of course—of course: God knows there’s been enough of it—I and . . . how the business is ultimately to end—is what no man knows—! ”

The Count has lowered his heavy eyelids and is gazing at his tobacco-box—stroking the smooth silver surface again and again with his fingers, the while he thinks:—“ Come to an understanding with those others there—! Find a way to an eternal Peace?—there’s romancing for one again—! The Empress Elizabeth’s eternal Knight of Romance! ”

But the King’s thoughts push onward—they soar beyond the grim unsolved tasks of the present, attacking the future and all its problems. Now that he is talking he alludes to victory as an understood thing; a matter as to which no one at the table is to imagine he would as much as harbour a doubt:—

“ It is up to us Germans not to senselessly handicap our vanquished opponents with regard to the terms of Peace. We shall have to make common cause in assisting Europe along the path of civilization, and that does not mean breaking the vanquished in both body and soul, for the sake of a moment’s triumphant satisfaction!—Preparing ways for civilization means—for the victors in this war—seeking, to the very utmost extent of possibility, to become cognizant as to the cause of our differences—and to then try to understand—and to build. . . . ”

He lapses into silence, but his words echo within

him, and they then appear to him in the light of a vow: a voluntary vow, pledged here—on the threshold of the decisive moment and before a Higher Power, one that will hear his voice and in Whose Hands rest all earthly happenings: thus does he make these others witnesses of his prayer and his desires.

The old Colonel-General, seated beside the Chief of the Civil Cabinet, has bent slightly forward, turning towards the King: his cautious and rather repressed voice seems to come from a distance, as he carefully places his words—one beside the other—as though this experienced old courtier were testing the ground upon which each is to fall:—

“Does Your Majesty think that our opponents—let us say—the French, supposing they came out victorious, would give the same thought to our future—?”

But the King turns to his aged Excellency with an abrupt movement—and his voice sounds husky and almost mandatory—as he says:—

“My dear friend—are we not Germans?”

Silence—

The Colonel-General is seated again in line with the others and his face is a trifle redder as he helps himself to a cigar—carefully cuts off the end, and draws the lighter towards him. The Counsel of Legation is smiling without the least attempt at concealment, his teeth flash and he reflects good-humouredly:—

“What bosh—what rubbish . . . and nothing teaches him—” And the Civil Chief studies the nails of his thin and wary fingers with a thoughtful and sceptical mien; to him it seems patent that the arguments just advanced are no more than so much empty sound:—“*Are we not Germans? and I know no Parties!* . . . As if we were still standing in the July and August of 1914—and . . . Good Lord! What haven't we experienced—taking recent times alone . . . !” What is there that doesn't call itself ‘German’ nowadays—though no more

than some shady parasite and blood-sucker fastening on the Fatherland that is fighting for sheer existence! ” And he says, doing so with some anxiety, and seeking at the same time that each of his sentences may serve as a foot-hole, as it were, to his friend and King:—

“ We shall be confronted with stupendous tasks *within* the Empire too; the people have changed during these four years of such hitherto unknown difficulties. Every man who has been away for any length of time and has then returned again to his own circle will find not only a new world about him, but also find himself up against entirely new conditions . . . while the same is bound to apply to the governing parties—and here possibly even to a greater extent. Then too, each man returning home—as also those who had remained there—will be desirous, each according to the extent of his sufferings and experiences, of taking part in the consummation of that victory—doing so according to his own conceptions. I can indeed well imagine that many will encounter—both on the Right and the Left—outbursts of the most unbridled passion and violence—fanatical Leaders, and even the masses worked up to deeds of fanaticism. And then there will be all the enormous difficulties entailed in demobilization and—finally, the very Soul of the People, fretted by these many years of war conditions, and sick with their voluntary as well as compulsory sacrifices . . . this too lies before us: indeed, it may be years before such strength will be vouchsafed to all as may enable us to strike a balance in the matter of labours in which we might hope to make common cause.”

The King nods, yet this parenthetic statement disturbs him: it stirs him to uneasiness, seeming to drive him back from the track he had blazed with both word and gesture as a trail for his yearning desires: for he replies with a touch of impatience—as though waving the matter aside:—

“ Should it be so . . . and I can hardly believe it—! You also will have to show what you are

equal to! ” then—having recovered himself—he added in an assumed tone of assurance:—

“ The Victory will bring that inner balance along with it. Each one will be proud of his share—the fighter as well as the man at home: they will wish to be Germans above and before everything else. Party divisions will be relegated to the background—in deference to the National Idea and all minds will find themselves united by newer and firmer bonds owing to the victorious issue of this war.”

The Prince across the table is in complete agreement: his flat and watery eyes seek the King. The Count, who, seated beside the Medical Staff Officer, is at the end of the table, is using his gold pencil-case to decorate the newspaper margins with delicate profiles of pensive-looking women of the Botticelli type, the while he muses:—

“ But—what if it should all turn out quite differently? What if Victory gives us the slip—either to-morrow, or the day after . . . or in any case? What price then this ‘ National Unity ’?! What about the very opposite to it all?! ”—

And the long Major of the Garde-du-Corps raises his eyebrows and fidgets with his signet-ring, engraved with his armorial bearings, as he thinks:—
“ Kick them all out of the Reichstag! Sack the Climbers and all the stinking brutes! The National Idea? Why, it’s the most natural thing in the world! ” and he emits the smoke through his narrow aquiline nose, his mind still busy pondering the matter:—

“ As soon as ever I get promoted to the command of the Garde-du-Corps, I’d just like to see the pig-dog who wouldn’t tumble to the National Idea! ” and then, feeling a sudden need of the Social element—the necessity of “ keeping in touch ”—he turns to the comfortable and rotund Chief of the Military Cabinet and enquired in deeply interested undertones:—“ Are you driving to the look-out post later on with the rest of us? ”

A shake of the heavy plethoric head, followed—as the King turns his attention to the other end of

the table—by an almost imperceptible, yet expressive smile:—"What—I drive along there too? *I should think not!* Only delays matters and—what's the good anyhow? Is it likely to be any the better for my looking on, eh? Bosh!—I'm going to sleep it out: to-morrow morning, while I'm shaving, the Orderly will come along with the latest wireless reports and—well, I shall then be just about as wise as the rest of you. . . ."

The King talks on: he is now seated more erect in his chair and the deep blue eyes are full of light. At times he raises his right hand and with a bold quick gesture underlines, as it were, some vivid picturesque sentence. Some subtle urge seems to be compelling him onward, some desire to counteract the stillness, and it is to this end that he speaks, seeking to combat some force of which—both within and without—he yet senses the presence, both far and near. And therefore does he talk to each; talking far more than is even requisite to quiet his own uneasy breast. He wants to hear a strong and resolute voice—to fill the horizon before him with the aspect of a future secure from all drab horror,—all upheavals and uncertainties. He wants to drown this dim, dull fear of threatening spectres, which—though consistently avoided, yet crouch in certain hidden nooks, deep down within his being—drown them with brave words such as shall give evidence of his unmistakable belief.

No!—There will blossom forth a Golden Age for all fruitful ideas—for all creative faculties! Tasks of as yet unimagined dimensions are waiting for every German! Our technicians and our engineers have rendered incomparable services—not to speak of what science has done for us during these years of war. And now, constructors, architects, inventors—all will be able to devote their powers—their talents to this work of reconstruction. The forty-two centimetre gun—the great "U"-boats—the Zeppelins—the cannons turned on Paris—all these creations of muscle and brain, now pledged to works of destruction, will but reveal intensified abilities,

when once applied to schemes pledged to disencumber the Empire of all the evil after-effects of these strenuous times. There will indeed be no field of labour that is not brought within its influence.—

He feels elated and convinced at the pictures of the future he thus sees rising before him: These phantasies waft him far away beyond the immediate present. Possibilities seem to press in upon him from every domain of human activity and his brain—ever ready to concern itself with a thousand and odd particulars—now seems to gather together all these radiations, concentrating them, as it were, within his own person, while emitting their refraction. Thus in his brilliant dilettante way building with them a new world—some figment, whereof the texture yet bears the glitter of actual genius: a world, moreover, in the coming into existence of which, he honestly believes.

His eyes light up and his words force themselves upon his listeners. A convincing persuasiveness seems to flow from him, causing what is yet so distant to appear as though near at hand: that which is desired—attainable. The keen and nobly-formed head appears spiritualized—for in these dream-pictures of the future he beholds a radiant Present.

All around him are still—even the most critical and reserved follow him, carried away by this limpid, rushing torrent wherein all things possible, unlikely, demonstrable, and contestable meet and mingle:—

“What we require for the existence of our people our land will produce—both at home and in our colonies. It will be the aim of that National Self-consciousness imbuing our new economic life to make us entirely independent of all foreign markets. The harvests of the future will be far in excess of the old ones, for we shall be in a position to provide ourselves with undreamt of quantities of artificial manures; not another hundredweight of saltpetre shall be brought across the frontiers—we shall save millions upon millions in the matter of our agriculture! Then—there are our factories:—our iron-foundries will be erected in the midst of highly-

cultivated fields, where the improved systems of drainage will still further serve to heighten the yield of their crops. Thus Industry will grow its own bread, the factory sites contributing to the maintenance of the Workers! And we shall have gas-motors such as are capable of a power of production hitherto unknown. Physics, Chemistry and Natural Science will be the physicians that shall efface the scars of all our wounded. They shall tackle problems, before the far-reaching consequences of which old times shrink back aghast. The unused forces of the tides will become harnessed for men's use: the dormant treasures of the ocean will be turned to fruitful account—while the light and heat of the sun will be applied to new channels of usefulness."

He lapses into silence, yet looking about him joyous and elated: he feels like some rider who, after galloping ahead, draws up abruptly, and senses his horse's accumulated high pulsations throbbing, as it were, beneath his hand. In the eyes of all glows the reflection of his own firm belief: then he adds:—

"All that we shall bring to pass!" then he turns—looks at the clock and rises with a movement of quick determination.

The Colonel-General catches his eye:

"Is it time?"

His aged Excellency stands at attention before his King:—

"The cars have just driven up, Your Majesty!"

The young officer answerable for the Motor Service has hurriedly vacated: the red, good-humoured, boyish face, beneath its shock of fair hair looks perturbed. For him the impending battle is fraught with dangers of which the rest hardly think:—of—exhausts, or burst tyres.

The King presses the hands of the Chamberlain and the two Chiefs of the Cabinets who are remaining behind:—

"By the time we meet again, we shall—so God help us—be nearer to our end and aim!" and his features have become set and serious under the sig-

nificant stress of this moment of parting. Then the men to whom his words are addressed bow low in silence.

He leaves the dining-saloon and, followed by his attendant suite, strides down the long narrow corridor to his car.

Behind him are the Colonel-General, the Staff Captain and the Medical Officer.

The Counsel of Legation takes a cigarette from his gold étui, knocks it two or three times against the case and smiles:—is it cognizance—confusion—or reflection? God knows! Possibly he is merely indulging in a habit, but he remarks:—

“ Well—the King was once more in rattling good form to-night—eh what? ”

And the slick little Jäger gives him an understanding nod and a grin, adding:—

“ That’s just about it! ” and then addressing himself to the Prince who has just produced a flat cut-glass flagon from somewhere within his corded grey military coat and is pouring cognac into a tumbler, he says insinuatingly:—

“ What does Your Highness say to a little rubber of Whist? The Baron will doubtless join us—eh what? ”

And the Prince nods without troubling to remove the glass from his lips.

The Counsel of Legation lights his cigarette and laughs:—

“ Very well—go ahead,” says he; “ what’s the use of this rotten life anyhow? ”

And outside the grey cars speed on their way.—

IX

SPEEDING battlewards—The cars roll on through the mild night, the air damp—though no rain is falling. They carry no lights and bear a resemblance to some mysterious black beasts as they tear foe-wards, passing at regular intervals over roads about which hangs a heavy pall of impenetrable darkness.

The one leading carries the Standard, but night has, as it were, absorbed the colours from that fluttering square of bunting.

The King:—seated alone, in front of his two adjutants, he gazes out into obscurity—silent and serious. His thoughts are with the battle, which now, in less than two hours, will be breaking forth—blasting the heavy silence with its crash, tumult and devastation. The heat of a hot-house is lying over the land. The night is starless, and in the heavens alone—a mere band tinged to a faint silvery hue—seem insufficient to relieve the dense obscurity that lies over far and near. Dark and sinister, gigantic and mysterious, like the jaws of some dragon looms the night: it waits in readiness to swallow up each car as it glides forward on its way. Houses seem to pass them—dumb, clumsy-looking erections; blacker still than the night.

Trees take on fantastic shapes—not as much as a leaf stirring. Dark cataleptic forms are these trees, so long have they stood pondering over the times that are, till they can reason the thing out no more:—and now they just stand there—one beside the other—stark, in horrific silence.

Once the long Guardsman jogged furtively against the knee of the Count—then jerked his chin forward. But the Count inclined his head with a negative gesture.

Motionless, as though petrified in thought, sits the King: not a word has he uttered since the cars started out on their journey. Now they skim past columns which are going forward too. Broad swelling masses heave into sight—though black as the darkness of the night. They present dim outlines and resolve themselves into wagons, freighted with towering loads, and about the flanks and loins of the brutes straining at these weights lies a thin sheen of moisture. Wheels scrunch and groan beneath their burdens: chains clatter: horses snort: how immensely long these columns seem, and never so much as a spark of light!—Rolling mountainous bales; shaking, quivering iron cases—filled with munitions: huddled-up human beings, with arms outstretched in the darkness, are urging these masses onward—yet never a word—only the sternest will . . . in anticipation of—!

Then—at last a light!—out there—still in the far distance: a tiny greenish-white speck, then a bright pendant ball, looming suddenly in the heavens and floating—floating slowly . . . shedding a faint surrounding glimmer—then paling—dying away: a fire-ball sent up over the French positions.

The Colonel-General leans over to the young Staff Officer and asks through the darkness:—
“Does His Majesty happen to have said how long he intends to remain at the observation tower?”

“No, Your Excellency, but it’s my impression that he will want to remain till the first reports have come in from the armies—and that can hardly be before early morning—”

“H’m!”—and silence. Then, after a while:—

“As a matter of precaution I gave orders for them to bring some breakfast along—and some broth too—”

At midnight the last glimmer in the heavens dies away—leaving the earth darker than ever: the roads are chock-full of silent life. Unrecognizable monsters are propelling themselves forward—their angular threatening forms sheltering beneath coverings. Men bearing accoutrements plod heavily

forward, bending beneath the weight of their burdens . . . while before them waits Death—

The Front is nearer now: against the horizon rise from time to time quick blinking flashes; the French over there are engaged in restless firing—as though impatient to break the silence of the night—as if no longer able to bear the dull, asphyxiating, stifling stillness, and their white lights, continuously rising, serve to illumine monotonously some poor speck of ludicrously upturned earth . . . white eyes, are these lights . . . seeking—hunting—enquiring—

But over here all is still fairly quiet, as if this night had begun like any other one and meant to end the same way.

The drive continues to lie between fields from the waste ground of which arises an odour of staleness; then at length it dips into the dark depths of a wood. The firing of the French has now become more lively. It seems almost as though they knew what the night had in store for them—and could control their nerves no longer: bellowing away in a sheer overflow of expectation—

At the cross-roads within the wood the cars are brought to a halt: they have reached their destination.

Night—night:—no more than a spark or two piercing the darkness—dancing to and fro in the hands of dark and hardly discernible figures. Pocket-torches: officers: guides sent hither by order of the Executive Staff, to wait on the King and be in readiness to assist the gentlemen attached to the Chief Headquarters.

The figures report themselves—and introductions are effected. Words are uttered with the correct Service snarl,—intimating how great the suppressed elation of the moment—heels are brought together with a jerk . . . the scene is indistinct, but a sort of grotesque ceremonial is in progress between shadow and shadow. And now they are ready to move on, the way lying along narrow footpaths.

“Caution!—wire—!” and the words are passed back from one to another. Branches are carefully

raised and held aside by hands in succession: feet feel about cautiously over moss and decayed vegetation. There is the scent here of bracken, of birch trees and of wild strawberries.

Then, in the midst of this wood—arises a narrow, steep tower, constructed of wooden scaffolding. The ascent is made step by step: heel against heel, in ever-narrowing circles.

Following closely behind the newly-attached officer and guide comes the King. An uncertain glimmer falling from the carefully held torch spreads as it were a patch of light as carpet for his feet—enough to assure the placing of the next step. Behind the King climb the rest. Once or twice he pauses: the sombre wall of forest trees is already below his feet and a faint breath of air sweeps across unencumbered woodwork of the tower.

Onward again: for the erection measures some twenty-five metres and upon the summit is a covered platform, scarcely three metres square, and around this, at about the height of a man's shoulders, is a railing. A small table of rough workmanship stands towards the south and before it is an armchair. As the wind rises and sweeps about it the tower sways with a gentle undulating motion, as though alive and drawing deep breaths in this tense hour—so heavy with the weight of mystery.

From here the eye travels far—far . . . circling from west to east, embracing the line of the Front from the most western point of Rheims, across the town and away beyond the rising ground of Champagne—up to the hill-lands of Prethes and Tahure. Yet is this view still curtained with dark night, showing us no more than an obscure half-circle away in the immediate depths, where—owing to the magical and mysterious pulsations of the air—the coming and going of distant firing—its reflections flicker up across the horizon as the interplay of seeking—peering—enquiring lights become increasingly active . . . greenish-white eyes—that hang in the heavens for a moment or two—

The King gazes out across this feverish immensity

uttering no word. He is aware that the Staff Captain is spreading open the map—moving it about, jerking it to rights, and that he is engaged in a whispered conversation with the stranger in the steel helmet, who is pointing out and revising a few of the markings already put in. The white light disturbs him almost painfully as they move it slantingly to and fro across the map, now fastened down to the table with drawing-pins. To and fro scurries the light—like some live animal—now stealing—now fleeing onward over the surface of thin crackling paper. And still the two men talk on in low tones and compare: now the stranger recedes a step or two, and the Captain stands erect and at attention:—

“ May I be permitted to give Your Majesty some indications as to the country-side? ”

The King nods and turns towards the table.

“ Yes, my good—! ” but the lips move rather than speak; his throat is dry—has tightened, and will give no sound: then the young, clear voice of the other comes to him in its delivery of expert particulars:—

“ The map has been so placed that Your Majesty is now facing due south. Here—*this* spot is the south-west, just where the flickering lights at times seem specially pronounced,—the sword Your Majesty has placed on the table cuts it exactly—is the circle before Rheims. Then, from *here* the Front goes on to about Prunay—which we have to imagine just about *there*—immediately in that direction!—we can probably locate it as the spot whence we now see the fire-balls rising.—Then, from there the line bends in an easterly direction and should be visible to us later on during the firing, or by daylight, as running the entire length of Champagne, as far as Tahure. North-west lies Rheims—”

The King nods from time to time and gives a quick glance at the tiny moving circle of white light as it falls on the map: then his gaze seeks the distance. He is almost obliged to force his attention to the subject so as to receive an impression of the

sentences and the positions to which they refer. Yet the greater part of it he feels he had already mastered—it has become firmly stamped upon his memory and resolves itself into such particulars as bodies of troops; advancing gunnery; and the position indicated by the lines.

Of course—of course: he is “in the picture.” But he is roused to an almost unendurable pitch of suspense, and what he now hears at his side resolves itself into mere words—words—to which he says “Thank you” as these seem suddenly “taken away.”

And now he is standing in front again, both hands leaning on the lattice-work of the railing. Stillness prevails: the irregular firing causing no more than a certain tremor in the mild night air.

One o'clock:—how slowly the time passes!—

He has clenched his teeth and senses every muscle about his brow and cheeks. Another ten minutes.—

Behind him the others are talking in low tones: he can distinguish the nasal accent of the Staff Major—and the pedantic deliberateness of the Medical Officer . . . and he moves his head hastily as though brushing aside flies. . . .

Beside the small lamp standing on the table, lies the Staff Officer's watch. His gaze dives to the depths below—What Eternities!—

He presses his fingers firmly against the wood-work and raises his eyes heavenwards:—his thoughts—hopes—prayers penetrate the night in their imploring earnestness—their passionate humility—! “Lord—Lord! may it succeed. . . !”

Nine minutes past one—the second hand is faintly discernible in the glimmering light of the tiny lamp.

He can follow his heart-beats . . . feel the pulsations in each wrist. “Lord—Lord—! may it succeed. . . !”

And suddenly a low rumble breaks through the darkness—and another and then another . . . and a second later lights dart across the gigantic canopy of the heavens, as if some raging Titan had seized

upon them with his fists and were shaking the hidden light out of the dark veiling clouds. . . .

Relief—!

Hands flutter—outstretched . . . there are cries and exclamations; words break their chains and spring to the lips—are pitched across them—

This entire immensity has suddenly awakened to concentrated tumult: Wherever the eye may turn—it breaks forth a thousandfold—falling on the dazed and sleepy night—rousing it to wild and drunken horrors! Throwing red fire in a wild orgy of dementia—while chasms yawn amid a bellowing noise and spit forth tongues of fire . . . a purplish fire—like the glow of steel—shot with a yellow, green and violet radiancy. Burning sheaves are they—thrown from the mouths of the guns—in spurting geysers—vaulting balls—as thick rays and bunches of sparks. In the heights above the now extinguished stars do these burst, sowing wide their frightful seeds of iron on to the earth beneath—tearing open great craters in their blind, capering fury and lashing their grim wealth of upcast, glowing, murderous knives abroad about the land as it quivers and groans in the horror of Death. . . .

From that little platform on the tower, like some island swaying in the darkness high above the trees, there comes no word—no sound.

The men are standing with fixed gaze—the one in front against the parapet appears petrified and solitary among his companions as they stare out on this scene of unexampled frenzy: the others stand peering behind him. Once—as some terrible explosion arises, drowning these thousand bellowings, and darting, stabbing blue-white tongues of flame shoot up from distant depths—does the old Colonel-General emit some half-choked utterance—a cry—a question—?

But there is no answer—no movement—no one stirs.

It seems almost as though there had never been such a thing as human speech. And over there the heavens quiver with horror! Giants have

reared themselves from out these spitting craters: from bleeding crevices and wounded earth—have seized upon the night and would undo her. They tear the very heart out of her body, and—their thirst yet unslaked—are battering in upon her as she lies choking—fever-stricken—her withers wrung and trembling.

Flickering, shuddering fires lurch across the horizon—flee forward, driven on by the flames that follow after—rising to the very stars—falling again—the tattered sacrifices of new horrors—like crested waves o'er-topping each other as they break in boundless fury—and, ever punctuating—as it were—the inhuman horror of this spectacle, rise small, clear balls of light—white, red, and green, like children standing for a moment helpless—groping—seeking . . . stilled with a fear in the presence of this Hell—then sinking softly, paling, vanishing—

And at the sight of these uprising, radiant lights, so soon to fade away, the King—while gazing on this scene outstretched below—experiences a thought—and a tremor passes over him. “Men,” he thinks, “human beings! beings of flesh and blood stand there—stand and endure. . . !”

The words seem to take him by the throat and throttle him. . . . He makes a sudden gesture of command, as if compelled by agony to call a halt . . . then—sensing that one of the attendant shadows behind him is coming forward—he moves again, shaking his head with an anxious, negative motion:—No—it was nothing. . . .

Yet he tries to get rid of those words; words, behind which, in sight of this Hell of Death, this responsibility for millions of lives rushes in on him and—in his frenzied effort to escape their import—he comes up against another complex . . . a battle of material—of machinery . . . and his fevered senses seek shelter behind this new meaning while his thoughts ramble on incoherently:—

“Surely there was someone who, during the last few days, has been constantly harping on this coming battle as one of technical science? Machinery

was to set the pace—as the preliminary to the actual storm and attack. It had all sounded so impersonal—so professional, as though tubes and mechanism were alone concerned—falling on each other as parties engaged in some gigantic duel.

Another column of fire rises from the depths; seems to claw at the heavens and then fall back in dull, purplish clouds upon the death-stricken land. . . .

Men—human beings. . . !

Again the thought passes over the King's mind—staggering him. His pulses throb—he feels swayed between Reality and Madness. Both hands are clenched about the slender balustrade dividing him from the chasm at his feet. The watch-tower sways gently—obedient to the night wind; a smell of burning comes from afar . . . the mordant tang of powder.

“Like some man standing in a turret—with the seas everlastingly tossing at his feet!” thinks the King in momentary haze and uncertainty . . . his eyes riveted upon the ceaseless and murderous upheaval—staring out, heedless of the present pictures to where the white, red, and green illuminate this Hell of Fire—those torn and pitiful forms—those human beings who, the while this last madness of the Day of Judgment is being enacted around them, try, frantic and bleeding, to work their way from beneath some shattered obstruction—out of choked ditches and mine-holes: freeing their torn and mutilated bodies from the weight of companions now silent—senseless—dead—struggling with cries—with shrieks—with madness in their eyes!—Away . . . away—out of this pitiless horror!—

From time to time a few low words reach the King, but their sound has something strange and detached. The officer in the steel helmet and the Staff Captain are scanning the map for the spot whence arises the greatest conflagration; the Colonel-General is talking to the Major, in eager, excited whispers—he is telling him about some incident that had occurred during the bombardment

of Paris—at a time when he had been a young lieutenant, and the Major reiteratingly responds with:—

“Just so, Your Excellency. . . !! Of course, Your Excellency. . . !” It all strikes the King as distant and unreal: in this moment he feels solitary and without any actual connection with others . . . with these present, who yet live with him: without even any connection with those *out there* . . . who are dying for him—

Then, that moment in the afternoon, just after the lunch with the General Staff—at the Casino—comes back to him: he had had that same feeling then—that sense of being utterly detached . . . a dim sense of being “pushed aside.” He bites his lip:—

“It amounts to this!” he muses, “‘*With regard to what we now have in hand you are simply in the way!*’” And then he recalls the reflective manner in which the Field-Marshal had observed:—“Yes:—and we have got an excellent place of observation ready for to-night . . . should Your Majesty—”

A sudden feeling of revulsion comes over him: *they have sent him out here to be out of the way!*—he has been given “a box” to “view the spectacle” from—! so that he might not be about, and now—at the time when this tremendous decision is being felled—they are barely thinking of him—and the feeling of this exclusion falls like a blow on his dignity as their King—as their Supreme War Lord.

The old Colonel-General’s whispered reminiscences about 1870 are reaching him again and he seizes on the picture they seem to afford him:—*Sedan*—and the heights about Fénôis: was it not *there* that his grandfather, the Great King, had stood watching the struggle for victory going on at his feet?!—

The Struggle for Victory!—Victory . . . as it had then been—the Victory that should decide the downfall of *those others*. . . .

He is now full of hot impatience—mortified with this sickening sense of wounded self-esteem. . . .

His eyes pierce the distance once more—into the darkness, where the battle with its spurting, scorching flames still rages.

How long . . . how long more?—

Wild reddish fields of light now tinge the sombre skies—reflections of some great fires: one such patch towers erect, like some purplish-red column upraised against the night—and hidden away in yonder corner—with the guns hammering at her from three sides—lies Rheims.

X

IT is about three a.m. when the King turns to the Staff Officer at his side. The almost unconscious course his thoughts have been pursuing has found a way out: he will no longer be kept on the side-track—as it were; he yearns, indeed—feels it to be his duty to throw that which he may have to give into the balance with those others! A thousand times has he been told, and a thousand times has he seen with his own eyes and recognized that the troops are entirely different when alone, to what they seem when they know that his eye—the eye of the Chief War Lord—is upon them!

His voice now is husky and suppressed with the excitement through which he is passing: he knows that *that* moment—*out there*—when victory shall have been decided, will live on for ever with him and with future generations and—speaking across the darkness, he says:—

“The troops must be informed that I am near them in this hour of trial and that all my hopes are with them.”

And a figure, rising in the dark, clinks its spurs together, and says:—“Certainly, Your Majesty!”—

Then standing, and bending forward, the Staff Captain scribbles the message:—

The moments pass. . . .

The King is sensing a feeling of relief and inward exaltation. . . .

The fresh, soldierly young voice breaks the silence and reads:—

“ His Majesty desires that the troops should be made acquainted with the fact that he has arrived behind the lines of Attack and is watching the progress of the battle from the turret at Ménil. All His Majesty’s best wishes accompany the troops to whom His Majesty cries:—‘ With God for King and Country! ’ ”—

The King nods: yes, that will do—and, at the rickety little table, by the waning light of the pocket torch, he signs the message . . . the dash beneath that upright initial as bold as ever.

One of the Leibjäger is already on the scene and takes the message for transmission, hurrying through the dark down the winding stairs to the telephone-box at the base of the turret.

The heavy boots clatter on the wooden steps—then their sounds die away into those invisible depths.

A few moments more and the King’s greeting will be passing from the officers on duty to the men who form the attack.—

XI

HELL rages on without pity.—

The expanse of light spread over the heavens now takes grotesque forms, great gashes of fresh blood in the skies. . . .

A pungent mist, due to the steam from the powder and the escape of poisonous gases, lies heavy on the air: it gets into throats and lungs, burning the watchers’ eyes as they stare into the distance—seeking to penetrate what is impenetrable.

The King stands motionless against the balustrade—saying never a word.

His thoughts are at the Front again; they dwell on the men in that furious fire:—on those broken lives—on those death-wounds. . . . Responsibility for this dread happening?—No: none of this can fall on him in the sight of the Eternal Judge! Whatsoever there had been in his power to do, that had he done in his efforts to ward it off. During those summer days—now four years ago—had he not hesitated to a degree almost lacking in dignity! No means had he left untried: at Vienna—then with Nicky—then with George.—No path that might possibly have yet led to an understanding had he left untrodden . . . and he senses once again the indescribable, racking suspense of those days—sees those exciting scenes at the conferences in the New Palace, with the pendulum swaying between Hope and Despair: sees the War Minister, the Chief of the General Staff—the Grand Admiral—the Chancellor, who stands before him with documents and telegrams in his ever irresolute hands. . . . No:—he can raise his head unabashed—for he is free of blame: it was *they—over there: on them be the weight of Judgment!*—

Someone at his side is coughing discreetly: The Colonel-General has advanced cautiously and is moving the chair that has been standing before the little table:—

“ Would Your Majesty not like to . . . ? ”

“ No—thank you . . . ” and he dives back among his thoughts and visions. And now a pallor is softly creeping across this wall of blind obscurity, first hints of fading—and of dawn. The stars above grow dim—then vanish. The sharp contrasts of darkness and red glow disappear, as if wrapped in a veil. Night is invaded by a sickly glimmer and a damp and penetrating cold falls suddenly on all.

The King draws the fur wrap more closely round his shoulders, then notices that the Captain, whose misty figure has become detached from the circum-

ferent gloom, is taking papers from an Orderly and hurriedly skimming their contents by the dying light of the lamp.

The young officer draws his figure to its full height—straight and taut:—

“Your Majesty, the first wireless reports have come in from the armies: the Chief Army Command states that the fire-battle was at all points carried out in accordance with orders received and is now taking its regular course. The opposition brought to bear—we may say all along the Champagne district—is reported to be slight. It would seem, therefore, that here, the enemy has been entirely taken by surprise. Some of the more detailed reports are still wanting, indeed, they could hardly have come in yet.”

The King gives a quick nod: a word or two of the report impinge on his mind, bringing him relief:—“Following its regular course”—“—Opposition slight”—“Surprised” . . .

Gratitude, hope and faith now fill his heart. He smiles at the officer in the steel helmet, who is taking the first opportunity accorded by the grey dawn to set up a tripod telescope, and says:—

“Now at length I shall see what the Guide the Army has sent me looks like!” and then, in the relief of his mind, he adds a few more words of encouragement to those about him.

It is now half-past four: so light that the fierce play of fire is blotted out—and special objects, half hidden in steam and mist, are now distinguishable about the countryside. At his feet are the tops of the forest trees—to the south, and still played upon by that untamed fire, lie the undulating heights of Champagne: Pöhlberg, Keilberg, Hochberg, Cornilette. Towards the south-west lies Rheims, and westward—still almost entirely hidden, is the ridge of the Chemin des Dames.

Then, suddenly—something entirely new associated itself with the fire darting its way through columns of choking gas and walls of densest steam. It has assumed an elongated line—all along the Front, and

would seem to be marshalling these countless blows and hobgoblin capers to some definite advance—

“The drum-fire, Your Majesty . . .”

The King has approached the telescope, peering through it a few moments into a seething fire of smoke, through which dart stabs of lightning—chaotic masses—wild and whirling . . . shapeless withal—and spouting, spitting geysers—then turns aside from this detailed portion of the enormous spectacle and stands against the balustrade—

The drum-fire. . . .

Rolling, bursting, thundering and bellowing—as though the Monster, now seeking to escape from those chasms were about to throw itself upon the martyred land with its last remnants of humanity—bent on outdoing all that had gone before. With unexampled cruelty does this horror advance—step by step, dealing blow upon blow—hammering strokes from the glowing steel, as though who should say:—“What—you still live? You have lived long enough!—You gape with wounds?—well—here—take your *coup de grâce*!—are you dead this time?—Another blow, that I may make sure of it! ”

And onward it strides—step by step . . . none shall escape—sowing further desolation as it seeks its final sacrifices. . . .

And behind it—close behind, under the shelter of that fiery hail, creep—amid pain, blood and horror, the German men who have taken this Hell of debated ground—the Victors.

The King stands and shivers in breathless concentration as he stares out on to the heaving sea of dingy grey steam and noxious vapours—of sticky filth and stirred-up corruption, touched here and there with the quivering glint and glow of countless centres of explosion.

This firing is a tornado—it is Death stalking abroad—rolling ever farther forward—step by step, metre by metre:—it has leapt across the tattered shreds of tangled wire about No-Man’s-Land . . . has crossed the first ditch—the second—the third—!

Stamping over and bearing down each position after the other—staggering on, blood-drenched, like some bellowing murderer, like some unearthly creature that has run amuck;—one—two—three—four kilometres deep. . . .

Its bellowings shake the earth—deepening their rolls of thunder now that the point of devastation is at hand. . . . Then another phase develops: knock — knock — knock — knock —: the machine-guns. They have joined in suddenly and are hammering without mercy — hard — insistent — unceasingly — breathlessly: as though someone, in a tearing hurry, were hammering little nails into hard wood.

Behind the King stands the young Staff Captain. He is speaking and his bright voice is now husky from all these experiences.

“Our men will now be in the enemy’s trenches,” he says; then, correcting himself, and with a movement of his hand:—

“Or rather, in the mine-holes that are about there.”

The King hears the words but he does not move. Yet with emotion he thinks:—

“Fighting at close quarters?—yet—what can have remained to attack or to defend?”

The firing of the guns is now becoming fainter and more distant. It seems almost as though it were withdrawing before the light of the dawning day and of awakening Nature. Isolated voices seem to disconnect themselves, as it were, from that fearful chorus, taking up their separate quarrels: Batteries fall upon each other and carry on a heated dispute. The drum-fire squirts up again—and falls back exhausted with the fury of its own ravings, finally dwindling to a mere desultory, aimless shooting.

The enemy over there seems now to be more lively—especially along the line in the south—and still do the machine-guns hammer on.

They seem to be everywhere—and nowhere: now here—now there—hitting away in a kind of death-fury; going for each other as though panic-

stricken—barking at one another, like so many excited village curs. And of a sudden the King is aware of what the lessening of the battle of fire with its subsequent struggle conveys to his consciousness, and he says to himself:—

“Within that gigantic circle about sacred Rheims—from Château-Thierry on—to as far as the Argonne the decision will now have been reached. Now the first stage of the victory has been won—and the great wave is about to break in force—*or—or—*”

His heart is beating like a hammer—his teeth are set . . . the early morning frost is on him—he can feel the chill extending up as high as his shoulders: the biting poison wafted upward from those dense masses of smoke gives a soreness to his eyes and irritates both nose and throat—

No—! he must not dwell on the alternative. . . .

The officer in the steel helmet is standing in front—and now the King can see his face. How curiously haggard it is:—in the morning light it bears the appearance of no more than a surface of yellow skin stretched across the bones.

“Maybe the skirmishing about the last barriers that have survived our fire, Your Majesty.”

No reply:—

Time goes on: a red light rises, gleams in the east—the sun . . . another day.

The King still stands rooted to the edge of the parapet—his face towards the field of battle, his right hand clasped about the rail. He is struggling impatiently with one question:—When will he finally know?—When—when will the first reports as to the success of the fire—as to the results of the storming—reach here?—

Every moment that passes is torture and agony to him. His nerves are racked to their utmost, yet he silently fights for mastery and asks no questions. No one shall notice his agonising suspense—the anxiety against which he is struggling: he will maintain an outwardly calm bearing; they shall be witness to his soldierly confidence.

Nor does he adopt this mask in a spirit of empty

conceit, or play-acting, but from a sense of duty to his position as King—interpreting in his acts all that this means to him—all that he recognizes and would therefore fain endure. For *this*—inviolable to all upheaval, unassailable by human fears and doubts shall, as the supreme evidence of God's Power, rest, too, beneath the Protection of His Mercy: the weight may press upon the bearer's shoulders, yet so that he may by his example be a support to all who are faint-hearted; neither fear nor cowardliness shall attach to the garment of his kingship in the sight of these other men—

He gazes afar—yet with unseeing eyes, and thinks:—

“Those who in days to come speak of these stupendous world-historic days shall then be able to say: ‘At no moment did he doubt—he placed his faith in God and in the army, knowing that we should carry it through. . . .’”

And in the impulse arising from the passionate thoughts he turns for a moment towards the gentlemen of his retinue . . . and there he sees—the Colonel-General, slightly bent at the knees from long standing, gnawing away at a sandwich which he hurriedly thrusts into the pocket of his cloak when caught in the act. The King's smile is slightly constrained, as he says:—

“Good appetite to Your Excellency!” and then shakes his head with a touch of exaggerated horror as he notices the greenish, frozen, “all-night-up” countenances of those present—now pulling themselves “into position” under his eye.

But conversation has lasted no more than a few minutes when an explosion in the distance calls him to his post again:—it was a munition depot “going up.”

Six o'clock. A pale light spreads across the dismal smoke-laden landscape, and from the far depths below come sounds of life. There are footsteps and voices—the scrunch of wheels—the whinnying of horses: evidences of more troops and columns going to the Front.

Over there—where the forest ceases and the road leads its winding way into the meadow, little grey dots may now be discerned passing onward—

How fresh and undisturbed it all looks!—With the field-glass to his eyes he follows the march of the troops,—taking this sight to be a good sign—an evidence that all is proceeding according to plan and desire.

The young Staff Captain, rosy-cheeked, unconcerned and cheery, as though quite oblivious of the fact that he has been on duty all night, retires carefully. He intends to proceed downstairs himself, this time, and get into personal communication with the Supreme Army Command.

“They must know something or other by now,” thinks he.

As he passes on his way his eye catches sight of the Major, who—standing on the north side and leaning with his back against the railing, is turning his eyes imploringly heavenward with a look of acute anguish, as though he would say:—

“Now, Children! If this isn’t the limit!—God knows there is nothing more to see or hear *out there*—! And yet—a fellow is kept standing on his beam-end for *nothing—absolutely nothing!*”

But the Captain only smiles. Carefully he edges his way past the Medical Officer, who—his silver-grey cloak wrapped tightly about him,—and in an attitude of weird contortion, is propped up against the turret steps. Shrunk and yellow does he look, with little of the philosophizing aspect left about his usually well-groomed face—the half-open mouth emitting a faint wheezing snore.

The King is standing before the telescope and looking in the direction of Rheims. But though he has altered the sight—so as to get the right focus—he finds that district too befogged and everything remains impenetrable. He has purposely refrained from taking any notice of the young Guardsman’s absence and yet his thoughts are following him and, in his impatience, he can hardly await his return.

He harkens for any sound rising among the dense expanse of tree-tops, now swaying in the morning air, but nothing more than an uncertain, undefined buzzing seems to accompany that motion, and the quarter of an hour strikes him as an Eternity—

At last—at last!—Footsteps—the clink of spurs—hurrying up two steps at a time . . . it must be he!—

He has already reached the step on which the “Staff Medical” is reposing, and he gives that officer a dig . . . then on past the others and is now standing before the King—slightly out of breath and with a paper containing some notes in his hand. The rest have come forward to hear.

“Yes?” comes the quick question, uttered with a gasp of strong emotion.

“Your Majesty—I have just called up the Division of Operations—was able to speak to ‘one-A’;—the undertaking seems up to now, and in as far as we can judge, to be developing entirely according to plan. The reports from the armies are only coming in slowly—nor are they themselves able to obtain a connected view of all that has taken place among the attacking divisions—so that the picture—as a whole—has some gaps, so to speak; there have been no reports from some divisions as yet. This is entirely what might be expected—the wires are down . . . shot to pieces . . . the runners have not been able to get through in many parts. Aerial observation has been hindered by the smoke and by the morning mists. The communication between the troops advancing and in action—and the Staffs—has, therefore, as yet not been re-established—”

The King nods several times hastily:—

“Naturally—yes—of course . . .” while his eyes, fixed on the young officer’s lips, can hardly wait for the words.

The Staff Captain gives a glance to the sheaf of notes in his hand:—

“The reports from the Seventh Army are comparatively detailed:—they announce their firing to

have been carried on under conditions which were from medium to good. The opposition put up by the enemy against Artillery fire and communications did not exceed anything it has done during recent days. The enemy was in stronger force about the valley of the Marne and our bridges there. According to reports so far to hand, the Marne has been successfully crossed and our Infantry is proceeding onward—advancing north of the Marne, in the wake of the drum-fire—” and the young officer is about to turn to the little table with the map, so as to indicate the movements just described to be taking place on the west of Rheims, but the King motions to him to desist . . . he is in the picture. He sees the map before him now just as he had seen it at midday yesterday—upon the great table in the room of the Quartermaster-General: sees every line, every point of attack, every body of troops—. Sees a firm hand, upraised to pounce—then coming down with its fingers outspread upon the faintly rustling paper; hears a hard, quick, hammering voice—flinging its deliberate words out upon the stillness:—

“ . . . *Detachments of von Böhm's Army—on the south Front—cross the Marne at Château-Thierry, as also at Dormans, pushing in the direction of Épernay—along both sides of the river. . . .*”

Those were yesterday's plans and decisions—they have in this hour become facts and events!

Victory is on the march—!

His eyes brighten and he inhales the morning air—deeply—thirstily. Doubts have disappeared—all faintness of heart has vanished, and his increasing confidence carries him away, far beyond the picture indicated by the report. The first and severest step appears to him won—and God will grant further aid! The passage of the Marne has been successful—the troops are on the march . . . the Wheel of Fate is revolving on the others—!

Years seem to have been lifted from him as though by magic: there is no trace of fatigue about him after this night of watching. A tumult of

gratitude and joy now fills his heart, while the young Staff Officer, looking at his notes again, continues:—

“The First Army was subjected last night to violent and destructive fire—part of which was a gas attack along all its positions as well as in the country to the rear—. In spite of this, however, the contact with the group consisting of Lindequist, Gontard and Langer, was accomplished without a hitch. The Artillery’s preparative work, and the subsequent Infantry attack followed according to plan. The reports—so far—speak of the good advance made by the Infantry—”

The King raises his head:—“Do you hear that, gentlemen?! Doesn’t all this sound excellent?!”—

The officers are standing in a closely-crowded group: they signify their concurrence; only beneath the drooping eyelids of the Count slumbers a certain reserve . . . as though waiting—and the Stranger Officer, in the steel helmet, sent hither on Special Duty, gazes out into space with a curiously unmoved expression on his lantern-jawed face. In his unemotional and matter-of-fact way he is following the meaning of those messages and he is at a loss to discern the source of so much jubilation: but the Colonel-General is full of enthusiasm:—

“Quite so, Your Majesty! more could not be expected in the first reports!—”

The young Staff Officer returns to his notes and says:—

“What, according to the Divisions of Operations, seems to be the least explicable part, is the view we get of the proceeding of the Third Army . . . in Champagne: although it is quite evident that certain divisions here have reported initial successes and that our Infantry—supported by the armoured cars—is making its advance along the entire Front. The particulars up to the present are as follows:—The Twelfth Army Corps has crossed the heights of Givet: the First Bavarian Army Corps has taken the first enemy position: the Sixth Army Corps has taken the heights of Klitzing—one

kilometre south of Tahure, as well as the Iron Hill—two kilometres south-east of Tahure."

"There now—! splendid!"

"... Certainly, Your Majesty; but there is nevertheless something that is not quite clear—: the Supreme Army Command had, at the start, and in consequence of the enemy being entirely taken by surprise—met with but very weak opposition in the way of Artillery fire:—now, however, they say that—according to the reports obtained from prisoners just brought in, and belonging to the Thirteenth and Forty-Third French divisions, that the attack had been expected for the past three days—and these prisoners further state that the positions in the rear were occupied by Americans—."

The Staff Captain lowers his hand with its sheaf of notes and brings his heels sharply together.

The King nods his thanks: then observes in tones of easy confidence: deliberate withal:—

"Well—if the French were actually expecting the attack three days ago, and were yet not able to stand their ground—this throws some light on their powers of resistance—and the state of their Reserves! And—as to what use the Americans may be . . . that still remains to be seen. . . . I have no doubt that our men will be able to account for them too!"

Then, turning to the table with the map, he seized one of the coloured pencils in order himself to mark the new positions that have been taken: There is the 170 metres Hill—the Iron Hill . . . then leaning both hands on the table he looks down at the map and nods; and—as the dull thuds of the guns roll on, he visualizes success following success. He pictures in his mind the extended operations of von Böhm's left wing pressing eastward; he sees von Einem's pouring like a thousand resistless torrents across Champagne—sees Rheims hemmed in—throttled by this bearing down upon her from both sides . . . and still vibrating with exalted feeling of confidence and faith, he returns to his stand before the telescope to try and penetrate

the distance lying eastward, between Tahure—Perthes—and La Mesnil. Yet are those parts still befogged and grey; dense clouds of dingy yellow — suffocating swathes — and streaks of smoke. . . .

Behind him the Colonel-General is giving directions to the Leibjägers in a carefully restrained voice.

The basket that has accompanied the party is being opened near the top of the staircase: from thermos-flasks rises the steam of tea: glasses and mugs are being filled—hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches being divided: spirits visibly rise. The Leibjäger takes a decidedly doubtful-looking clasp-knife from his hip-pocket, passes the blade a couple of times across the leg of his trousers and peels an apple for the King.

Breakfast.—

XII

AN hour later.—

Broad daylight is over far and near. Yet here, above the trees, it is still cool, for the sun has not yet penetrated the clouds that hang about; but in the immediate vicinity woods, meadows, and moors lie open and revealed—distance alone is shrouded in mist and vapour.

Aviators are rising from the depths of the Hinterland—they pass towards the Front, and return:: Observers and Investigators. The sounds coming from their machines vary from a clear high pitch to a deep humming and buzzing.

The early morning reports from the armies have arrived. In the main these amount to no more than what One-A—of the Supreme Army Command—had already transmitted. Yet, in black and white, and after that first bout of frightful expectation and tension, it all seems to read as a little tame and empty—almost disappointing.

Now that waiting has become inevitable, what shows more clearly than before, is that the battle is still in its initial stages and that practically nothing is known. What the decision will turn on—whether the troops now being brought up to the Front will retain their mobility, or whether the enemy may succeed in stemming the force now being thrown forward, with so much energy, and bring it to a standstill—it may even take a couple of days before the results can be definitely known.

A certain amount of aftermath has come over most of the gentlemen. It now all seems so far away and peaceful—when compared with those recent hours of suspense: indeed it seems as though the chief object for which they had come out here—spending the night in weary wakefulness—were accomplished. The Great Spectacle—that “Bust-Up”—those Fire-works—: of course, there is a certain amount of shooting and spluttering still going on—*over there*, but—in plain and actual daylight, it is by no means so exciting, and the row is partially lulled by all kinds of other sounds welling up from the depths below; sounds such as human voices, wagon-wheels, the clattering of horses’ hoofs, the twittering of birds, the rustling of leaves.

One’s privacy has been invaded—as it were—there is a sense of discomfort at the same time, for—in one’s capacity as a soldier—it seems slightly ridiculous—not to say *infra dig.*—to be knocking about here, a good fifteen kilometres behind the fighting-line, and then . . . as to this “active service” as Adjutant and Court Official—well, the rôle becomes superfluous! . . . in short—*one isn’t in it!*—For, at this juncture, His Majesty thinks of nothing but the roseate wisdom of that pushful General of his: if one could but get out of it for a time . . . but then there’s that weak-kneed old mummy of a Colonel-General—keeping a sharp look-out all the time. . . .

The long Major musters the Automobile Officer through his half-closed eyes and observes with a nasal drawl:—

"Pannemann, excuse me—I really don't want to be offensive—but I like you so much better when you've shaved: should your girl see you as you now are . . ." and the Major shakes his head dubiously. Then turning to a fellow-officer, he remarks:—

"Well, Count, are you going to confide to us what we really *are* waiting for now?" And the Count, who is in the act of lighting a cigarette, replies in matter-of-fact, though cautious tones:—

"Our Supreme Lord is once more indulging in one of his tireless days, I take it. He's been standing up there in front now for the last eight hours on end—hasn't sat down as much as once yet."

The King, standing on the south side of the parapet, appears neither worn nor weary; he is at the telescope, feverishly following the smallest occurrence discernible about the countryside; trying to determine every new particular that the growing light, now piercing the veils of morning mist, may throw into bolder relief. The Staff Captain and the Stranger Officer have their work cut out to keep pace with him. And, at the same time, while scanning this huge circle of a panorama, extending from the chalk-white turrets of Berry-au-Bac, across Brimont, Rheims, the Valley of Py, and as far as Tahure, he is becoming sensible that somewhere, within the final depths of his consciousness, certain words and impressions, which at first had passed unnoticed, have yet left a deposit—as it were—whence now arises doubt and uncertainty. Vague questionings are threatening his confidence—seeking to disturb that exalted faith. Wavering, dubious thoughts, to which he would fain not give ear . . . from which he recoils, concentrating all his faculties upon the surrounding world of objective interests; slaking his thirst for knowledge, warding off doubts, in activity, so that no untoward thoughts may find ingress.—

And yet—in spite of all this eager study of the country around, the thought breaks through and—

for an instant confronts him: just at moments when he sees those miserably-drawn and fantastic features of the officer in the steel helmet, or when the Staff Captain's words recur to him:—" *but there is, nevertheless, something that is not quite . . .*"

But then he quickly thinks:—

"Oh, what nonsense! That man is wearing the gold stripe, so he must have been wounded five times—been through the mill . . . that's what makes him look so used up, and that will be why they sent him here to me—conferring a special distinction on him. But—the Captain . . . and—the prisoners' reports? . . . yet—what reliance can be placed on these?"

And, with anxious precipitation, he starts talking of other things; tries to determine whether—*over there*—in the south, where the smoke is now increasing to such a marked extent . . . in the area in front of Prunay—where he knows Lindequist's group to be in action—and to where the division of the Two Hundred and Third Infantry has been brought up, any advance of the attack is likely—

And all this time he is clinging with a firm determination, to one strong thought upon which he builds his hopes; casting aside all anxious waverings:—

"Just one more hour—or perhaps—at most, two . . . and then we shall have got the next reports—and know for certain. . . !"

Then, as soon as ever this has been cleared up, he will break camp here, taking the car—first to Avesnes, to the Field-Marshal, then to the General. . . . And again the impatience is on him—the anxiety none shall see—and again does he wrestle with it beneath a mask of eager interest—busy and intent—ever fighting against that weary agony of suspense.

The hooting of a motor-horn rises from below—it comes from the road which leads through the wood to the foot of the tower. A long-bodied car, rushing madly ahead, with huddled-up men at the wheel and in the interior. It comes tearing along like some savage beast, snorting, barking . . . and

then is still. Below there is now a sound of voices—questions and answers are being given: the words are unintelligible, though they sound so clearly, the tones on the one part being almost boyish, while the replies seem to display more reserve. From above, flecks of light may be seen through the trees dancing, flickering over a mud-yellow leather jerkin:—the figures—curiously fore-shortened, when seen from that height—are divesting themselves of cloaks and scarves—

The King, seeing it all, waits on in anxious expectation, though ostensibly still entirely engrossed in his contemplation of the Fighting Front. A Leib-jäger comes hurrying up the steps and—somewhat short of breath—announces the visitor: His Royal Highness the Crown Prince: and the Colonel-General passes the news on.

The King raises his eyebrows:

“The Crown Prince?—Why, of course . . . certainly . . . ask him to come up at once: there is so much that is of interest to be seen from here—is it not so?”

He is full of animation: the proximity of his son—of one of his own blood—seems to act as a tonic, strengthening him—for in this coming of his own boy he sees, indeed, some likelihood of a solution to the unrest and uncertainties besetting him:—“For,” he thinks, “if anyone knows anything fresh concerning what is going forward in Champagne it must be he—seeing he holds the Chief Command in that section of the army—now in action, under von Einem, east of the Suippe.”—And bending over the map again, he listens to the sounds below. There are footsteps on the creaking boards and again there are half-distinct words.

How slowly they are coming up—to be sure! . . . Then—at last! . . .

Slight and smart—almost too slight—in his grey-frogged regimental coat and with the black shako of the Hussars, with its emblem, a Death's Head, above his fresh young face—stands the Crown Prince before the King:—

There is handshaking, embracing, greeting.

There is joyousness and heartiness; a sense of belonging to each other in glance and bearing.

The King now welcomes the easy exuberance of the younger man as a relief—although he has so often discountenanced it as being “unsoldierly” and not becoming the dignity of one of his station.

The Crown Prince’s two adjutants—the “Expert” Major, and the little Express-rider—with the quizzically-melancholy face—make themselves scarce in the background, diving in among the gentlemen of the suite. They are all known to each other—and there follows an exchange of nods and winks; a bit of a variety—this, anyway!—Only the haggard stranger in the steel helmet looks solitary and out of it, till the Count takes pity upon him.

In front, on the south side of the parapet, there is the Staff Captain, who is on duty—and but for him, father and son are alone.

The King is talking of matters in general: no, not even his son—who after him will wear the Crown—shall know aught of his anxieties and doubts! . . . but are they doubts?! Is it faint-heartedness?! Is it not rather the internal emotion of one, who—by reason of God’s Will—bears on his shoulders—in face of the entire world—so vast a load of responsibilities? And was not the heart of the immortal *Fredericus Rex* stirred by similar misgivings before the turn of battle, and when the “*to be, or not to be*” of Prussia was still trembling in the balance? Or . . . even take the later—and so deeply venerated Founder of the present Empire . . . ?

And then he exclaims with jovial animation:—

“How splendid of you to have come over—! We’ve been up here the whole night . . . a wonderful scene . . . simply unforgettable! No better spot could have been found to overlook the entire area from . . .”

The Crown Prince nods, and jerks his cap back into the nape of his neck, so that the fair hair, with

its early sprinkling of grey, is visible about the temples . . . it seems as though he suddenly felt the heat. . . .

"I've been at Maison Rouge and at Rethel during the night—been with the armies and at a few of the divisions' points of observation. About an hour ago I spoke to the Quartermaster-General over the 'phone, and he told me that you were here—in the watch-tower. Well, . . . I can't be of much use over there . . . so I just 'slid' over here!"

"And how are the armies getting on?" the question was put in a casual enough tone, though the King's glance was unsteady and he turned aside to investigate some object in the distance beyond.

The Crown Prince has placed his hands on his hips—his clear young voice seems now to hesitate:—

"Well . . . that's really what I've come about, Father: why I, so to speak, sprinted over . . . they don't exactly want to admit it yet, but I have the impression that we've got stuck in Champagne!"

The King turns round sharply and his eyes meet those of his son with a look of ill-concealed fear.

"What does that mean? 'got stuck'?!"

"Good Heavens!" and the Crown Prince raises and then drops his shoulders: he feels some difficulty in bringing out his words in the presence of that ashen grey face—but a few moments earlier so unconcerned.

The King gives a gulp and then says:

"Yet—only a few hours ago the Third Army reported that the Infantry was moving forward along the entire Front—?"

"Yes—*so it was*: it took the first enemy positions easily enough, too: occupying them. But, during the struggle for the second position, they came up against exceedingly heavy resistance and have been repulsed almost everywhere. Up to now, and in spite of enormous sacrifices, as good as nothing has been achieved—and, what is more, the old first positions have been swept by heavy fire since this morning—"

The King toys with the little gold tassels on the

cords of his regimental coat: he is aware that his hand is trembling and tries to conceal it.

He feels strangely confused—almost incapable of grasping the evil news now coming over him like some flood of misfortune. Everything was going so smoothly—so well: everything pointed to success . . . and now suddenly—here comes someone who stands there talking of things having “got stuck”—of superior opposing forces—of assaults being repulsed—!

The rim of his helmet seems suddenly to be pressing down on his brow like a band of iron and he can feel his voice growing husky. It seems all at once as if those dull misgivings so deep down within his consciousness—the promptings of which he had so manfully resisted, were now breaking forth—rearing themselves aloft—turning to threats and dangers that menace to overwhelm him—.

He gives a quick gesture—as though to tear some net which threatens to entangle him, and shakes his head violently—casting from him—as it were—these woeful tidings and all their weight of trouble:—

“What nonsense!—why, I understood . . . well, such things are usually the case at the start: we have had the very same experience before now—there was the twenty-first of March—don’t you remember what things looked like then—and how all rightened itself again—!”

And thus the King continues to talk—listening to the sound of his own voice, as it utters strange and futile words and advances many an argument, the while he knows that what he is saying cannot disguise his own dismay, nor tend to restore the quiet of his own mind.

The Crown Prince feels his father’s agony in every spoken word: reads it in the worn and rigid features of his face, with their expression of painful uncertainty, and—catching at the last sentence, he gazes out past the King and down on to the dark tree-tops, saying:—

“Yes: in the battle in the Spring—we surprised

them then. Then—and more so later on at the Chemin des Dames—”

“ And—surely now—? ”

“ No:—according to my opinion, they knew exactly what was coming, and must last night have cleared out of the front positions, for definite reasons, and then fallen back on the entrenchments of the second—where the means of resistance had been greatly increased. My Chief is of the same opinion and we have communicated what we surmise to the Supreme Command.”

“ And what do they say at Avesnes? ”

“ The General has given orders to turn all available fire on the second positions. That is what is going on now: should it succeed, an assault is to be made once more.”

The King nods. His distracted thoughts hover uneasily about and around these communications, and he bites his lip, as he thinks:—

“ And not one word of all this has reached me: neither from the Field-Marshal nor the General! Am I so entirely a *qualité négligeable* in the eyes of these gentlemen? ” and he senses acutely the mortification of having thus been set aside—it is, indeed, a slight to his dignity.

The blood surges to his head and he is on the point of calling the Staff Captain to his side—of bidding him 'phone to Avesnes, and demanding enquiries as to what is going on in Champagne, yet by a strong effort he resists this impulse, feeling, indeed, even greater distaste at receiving the kind of information they may think the suitable rejoinder to his enquiries.

And thus bewildered, he stares out in front of him, musing:—A small pale yellow butterfly has just alighted; it has poised itself on the white wood of the railing which gives off a pungent and aromatic smell—the scent of the resin drawn forth by the hot rays of the sun. The tiny wings, pulsating to and fro, seem as if breathing so as to gain revitalizing strength. The King clings to this possibility:—

“ Or can it be that they do not consider the matter

so serious after all? attach no great importance to it and therefore do not think it worth mentioning to me? Are waiting to give better reports when everything has become straightened out again?"

All is quiet: the Crown Prince feels the oppression of this silence; a silence that has so often before now seemed to raise a barrier between him and his father, dispelling all attempts in the way of frankness and confidence. He tries to speak, but his clear voice gives a slight break, as he says:—

"Of course everything is being rushed forward: Reserves are being hurried up . . . all that can be done, is being done—but—"

"But?—yes, well—do speak out—?"

"Well, Father, you spoke of experience just now: There are experiences which are due to reason—and experiences which are the outcome of some feeling, you know: you may call this an unsoldierly way of putting it—well, so be it! but I don't feel easy about this matter. Yet, quite apart from the mere point of what I feel, I have, as you know, been a bit inclined to criticise—since Verdun—"

The King draws himself up—memories of resistance and opposition spring to his mind at the mention of this name—the worst spell of all these many years! But no . . . he must not let these thoughts obtrude themselves now, and he shakes his head as he says:—

"Verdun!—my dear boy! you seem to have got 'nervy' too!" But the loud strident laugh, the way in which he seizes his son's arm and claps him on the shoulder, is forced and marks the tumult surging in his heart.

The Crown Prince stands silent, his head pushed slightly forward, his eyes looking past his father, away—into the distance to where rises the expanse of smoke about which the sunlight flickers and from whence now comes the dull roar of the guns and the cracking and hammering of rifles. Then he pulls himself up with a start and says:—

"After all—probably nothing more can be done—than wait and see how matters are going to

develop." And he then dives with one hand into the hip-pocket of his coat, brings out a silver cigarette case and offers it to his father and lights up himself.

"Yes: wait and see—and above all—keep one's blood cool!" responds the King, and then starts showing his son the points of special interest about the landscape, seeking, the while worry and anxiety consume him without cease, to yet show a calm exterior, such as may assure others as to the fullness of his confidence.

XIII

AT a discreet distance from the King, the gentlemen in attendance have managed to secure some degree of comfort for themselves.

An orderly has unearthed a bench and dragged it up from below, and on this some have perched—for all the world like so many hens at roost—while others are standing about in front, passing the time in smoking and chatting. Between these two groups, ready and alert—should his Royal Master but give a sign—yet at the same time keeping a watchful eye upon the others, stands the venerable Colonel-General and Commandant of Headquarters. Tired and, as it were, sunken within himself, stands the old man. He is dozing with his eyes open, while nevertheless ready at the faintest word to perform his accustomed duties. Voices are pitched low; conversations being carried on in an undertone. The Crown Prince's equerry remarks:—

"Well—after all . . . there's no blinking the fact that you've got some grit—you fellows! Been here since midnight—eh?"

The long Major puffs the smoke out straight in front of him and nods.

"Yes: that's our way: no Jewish hurrying about

us: but perhaps you can tell me, dear boy, when our Supreme Lord is likely to have had enough of this film—?” And the Staff Medical, who is gradually coming to himself again and who has opened his silver-grey cloak to the rays of the sun—just like some wearied but reviving flower, philosophises thus:—

“As a matter of fact, it is really quite inexplicable *how* His Majesty can be capable of standing all this—and his organism, when regarded in its capacity as a source of strength—is simply not in a position to . . . *but—he does it all the same!* We others double up—he hangs on—and doesn’t seem to as much as notice that he is tired: Now, please—! will you just see for yourselves!” And he turns his eyes to where the King stands, who has just seized his son’s arm and is clapping him on the shoulder.

The Count, who is standing in front of the bench, turns for a moment and then observes:—

“It’s merely the inner man that is keeping him going!”

But the Staff Medical says somewhat hastily:

“Excuse me, Count, but haven’t we an inner man too?”

The Count pauses, hesitates, and then adds with an ingratiating smile:—

“My dear Professor . . . *you* are Medico by profession, and a Philosopher by choice: if things do go wrong . . . you can, in your capacity of Philosopher console yourself—while in your capacity of medical man, you may always be able to get a billet at some cure-place . . . let’s say, at any one of those Silesian watering-places near to where his Serene Highness hangs out . . . whereas our Supreme Lord . . . !” But the Colonel-General, who in his half-comatose state, has caught a word or two, steps nearer.—He sheds on them a sweet smile, displaying a set of too faultlessly-constructed teeth, and his sharp blue eyes, brimful of animation, seem to be asking:—

“‘*Go wrong*’? Tell me, my dear Count, *did* I hear something about ‘*going wrong*’?”

And the Count says to himself :

“ Detective: that’s about it! not a word must be uttered within twenty metres of His Majesty that might possibly savour of depression; possibly dim the optimism of His Majesty—! ”

And so he says:—“ Oh—ah—well! we are only discussing problems of the most ordinary nature, Your Excellency. . . . ”

And the long Major, coming quickly to the rescue, asks the little Express-rider, who, with that look of melancholy experience upon his quizzical features, is seated on the bench beside him:—

“ I say—Malte, you get to know most things: what do you make of this game? ”

At which the Uhlan slowly raises his sleek head: he is at once “ within the picture ”—enjoys toying with it, and in that gentle voice which seems so thoroughly out of keeping with his spare and “ horsy ” appearance, murmurs: “ You mean the battle—? ”

“ *Why—yes!* ”

“ Well—what would you suggest? ” and the brown schoolboy eyes glance up enquiringly:—
“ We are ‘ victorious ’—my dear Jochan; in these momentous times we are always ‘ victorious ’ . . . and we shall continue to be so—till we’ve been done for. . . . ”

A pause. The Colonel-General winces—as if someone had incautiously stepped on one of his best corns—one dating from the year 1870, and in his fright, he sharply turns his eyes towards the King. No—! thank the Lord, he is still talking. And now those sharp old eyes are transfixing the Uhlan. They are watering and show tiny red veins around their pupils, and as he speaks, he gives exaggerated emphasis to every word, seems to “ chew ” each separate one, so to speak, before emitting it, while the tone is almost “ official ”—leaving all comment superfluous:—

“ May I ask, Herr Rittmeister,” says he, “ whether this is the manner in which you talk to His Royal Highness? ”

But the youngster is quite oblivious of the sharp reprimand administered and merely rejoins in his curt and unceremonious Casino tone of voice:—

“Never *you* mind, Your Excellency! the Crown Prince understands a joke . . . and—what is more—knows what is serious too! It only just happens to be his bad luck that he doesn’t somehow look as if he could be serious, and then—you see, if one happens to have hit on the job of being Court Jester one is, after all, bound to stick to one’s legitimate rights—and *occasionally*—tell the truth!”

The Colonel-General opens his mouth and gasps—he mouths helplessly for words which will not come. . . .

“Young ruffian!” suggests the Guardsman, obligingly, but the old gentleman is beside himself—and irately grumbles:—

“An entirely unsuitable sort of individual! Impossible for any position of responsibility . . . among exalted surroundings! Should be relieved—relieved of his duties at once. . . !” And his blinking eyes cast about in search of the Major:—

“Yet there! if his senior in rank and service is not calmly and benignly conniving, as it were! Call him to order, eh? Pshaw! what’s the Crown Prince’s crowd to me, anyway? Let him take who he pleases as adjutant! It’s simply ridiculous to let oneself in for anything with these young people . . .” and he gives it up—only shaking his head, now purple with indignation, and retires to his former post again. A few comprehending glances pass behind his back.

The gaunt officer in the steel helmet is standing against the railing: he feels strangely depressed and out of it all—as if he had dropped into an unknown world, one with which he has nothing in common.

“Neat—jolly neat—” comments the Guardsman, as he touches the bar extending across the Rittmeister’s chest. Straight and as narrow as a pencil is the line of multi-coloured ribbons attached to the Uhlan’s tunic.

"First time I've seen that sort of thing," continues the Guardsman. "Where's it to be got?"

"At Godet's, in the Charlotten-strasse; but you must mention my name: my own design, you know: can't stand those things with the metal underneath; always remind me of a Jew-boy, with a ready-made evening tie . . . impossible sort of thing! Well, anyway, one's netted this much over the whole wretched business!"

"I really must order one like it . . ." and the talk drifts on again into a sea of small things—ironical personalities, that don't offend—comrades all, belonging to each other.

Once the officer in the steel helmet bends his head forward and the movement serves to reveal the deep red scar on his neck—just beneath the collar; the tightly stretched skin across the wound looking almost ready to burst wide again. Out there, towards the south and south-east, the machine-guns are at it again, rifles cracking—hand-grenades swing through the air with thud and rumble—and to his quick ear with its hundredfold experience, this chaotic outburst has a deeper portent: he pictures scenes of unimagined horror . . . memories crowd up, holding him transfixed—pictures, such as these men now round about him have as yet never set eyes on. *There*, in the distance, the battle rages on: the outcome of which means—"to be" or "*not to be*." They storm again—storm on and—die . . . and then his eye rests on the King: he is standing in front, near the edge, talking eagerly to his son. But his perturbation is evident in each gesture of his hands—dull care and agonized uncertainty are in his eyes.—And then the gaunt man recalls the night—only a few hours ago—and he thinks: thinks of that strong appealing message flashed to the bodies of men standing in the field—what was it? . . . How did it run?—Oh, yes! he has got it!

"May all His Majesty's good wishes accompany the troops—His Majesty calls to the troops:—With God for King and Country!"—

And now they are at the assault—storming—dying. . . . With “good wishes” . . . and for that in which they believe—

Then all at once he feels confused: gazes about him and thinks:—

“I too seem at some time or other to have believed in all that—in the power and greatness of Personality—in Security and in the unshakable Will—” He burrows in his mind, where thoughts chase each other: was it on his birthday, or when—? one seemed then to have the picture before one’s eyes . . . the Soldier’s Ideal—Imperious—and with the Mailed Fist . . . the “Whoever-gets-in-my-way-I’ll-smash” sort of thing! And he sees himself again in attacks such as he has led many a time, and thinks:—

“When I ‘went over’ with the men, it was a case of getting there—or—going under. No third possibility—no other alternatives—then—no further delay—or sorrow . . . the heart took wings—with but One possessing it!” . . .

Somehow, he had pictured him like that—the Supreme War Lord—the King—and while he thus broods, an indolent nasal voice intrudes itself on his aimless, feverish day-dreaming and says:—

“No, Malte: it’s not *that*: Court Jester’s all rot, of course, but, as you know, and as that old mummy of a chap is always rubbing in—a regular smart adjutant has got to be a bit of a buffer, and things that look queer mustn’t reach His Majesty, see? His Majesty’s got to be kept in good spirits. . . .”

The officer in the steel helmet feels as though the floods were rising about him—and he muses:—

“How I fought for it all—almost died for it . . . taken for dead five times *out there*—: At Ypres, and in the Carpathians and at Douanmont: at the Pass of the Red Tower—and on the Somme—”

Then he touches the railing for a moment and closes his eyes. . . .

“What is the matter? Aren’t you well?” The Count has come to his side and is looking at him with ready sympathy in those kindly heavy-

lidded eyes. But the other is already himself again:—

“No—oh, no thank you! Just now and again that old shot in the head gets me—that’s all!” and he points into the distance, while a haggard smile plays about his thin and bloodless lips:—

“It’s when I hear all that—like an old cavalry horse, you know, when it hears the trumpets sounding! I seem to want to be there—”

Then he gives a dry gulp—and thinks:—

“And *be left there* . . . not be picked up again—”

XIV

THE sun has climbed the heavens and the light of noon lies over far and near. The steam and mist have vanished and in their place are bare and hilly ridges—chalk-grey mine-fields—weird and ruined remains. Balls of smoke, a dirty yellowish colour, rise here and there—loathly blots, within a wilderness, and the black mud issuing from them seems like some seed being squirted broad-cast before the evil mass recoils and collapses. Then here and there—should one happen to be lucky enough to be at the telescope—tiny black specks become distinguishable against the light upon this desolate waste. They seem like creeping insects—stumbling—hurrying up from one crack and making for another, then creeping down it, or—suddenly becoming quite still. . . . And, as an accompaniment to all this a roaring and a hammering and a gurgling. . . .

The sun, now at its height, discloses Rheims—Holy Rheims—relinquished after the first battle of the Marne, the second corner-stone of the enemy’s position—still impervious to all attacks, although the other—Soissons—fell in the last great push. And around Rheims now rages this fresh struggle.

The Crown Prince has already made two attempts

to withdraw—he has carefully endeavoured to lead the conversation into some channel which might enable him to take leave. He is eager and anxious to get back to his division and to the army in the field. He is not the sort of man to stand for long waiting on one spot: what there is to see here, he has seen: what can be done here, seems to him to have been done—therefore the thing is to move on. Better go forward to meet events, whatever they may be, . . . and—above all—not lose one's head: meet things in the spirit of the Modern Man, who can do more than adapt himself as best he may be able to the changes fate has in store—and against which one is after all powerless—

But the King pays no attention to his son's very evident attempts at bringing his visit to a close. He feels a disinclination to be left alone again—an intensified desire to find refuge from that threatening solitude, so fraught with heart-searchings, despondency and worry. No—no: he must first have tidings as to how things have righted themselves where those divisions were in action: must make sure that all those tales that this boy seems to have got into his head—just because things didn't come off at once!—are but so much vapour— And he turns to the Staff Captain, saying casually and with a forced cheeriness:—

“Eleven o'clock— isn't it? Well then, we may as well call up your friend 'One-A' again. If one isn't always sending these gentlemen a reminder they have a way of growing silent—” and he gives a short dry laugh, adding:—“That's so— isn't it? All you people of the Staff are the same in that respect! mum's the word! . . . mysterious faces! . . . every mortal thing has to be dragged out of you—gives added importance—eh? or—” But even as he speaks his own voice sounds strange to him—as though someone else—some indifferent actor were laughing: as if everything he desired should appear so unintentional, were having a directly opposite effect . . . his jesting words but serving to reveal his bitter earnestness. But the young

officer does not appear to notice these things: he smiles as is his wont, and says:—

“Why, of course, Your Majesty! that is part of the business—”

“There—there! see now! here is one who at all events is honest!” And nodding to the departing Staff Captain, he remains before the table, his anxious eyes fixed on the map. His thoughts are now propelled onward by a strong subconscious desire to find words to while away this new spell of waiting—to show himself to his son in the light of a resolute soldier and dowered with befitting regal calm.

There is that scene he had memorized: and—resting his right hand with its fingers outspread on the map—in imitative gesture of the General's action, he moves them vaguely over the course marked out for the advancing armies, and says—almost as though repeating a lesson:—

“Look here, my boy!—Accepting, for the moment, that the Third Army is no further forward—and even at the worst this can but amount to some delay on the part of the outer portions of the left wing—which, when we come to consider the entire operation, is of negligible importance . . . supposing, of course, that all the rest is in order. Well, then: when Böhm and Below come pressing down from Rheims we shall have outflanked the enemy position east of the Suippe—and the French are then bound to retreat—supposing, of course, that . . . ”

The Crown Prince is silent: he stands leaning slightly forward—behind his father—and is looking at the map. What he hears are but words—words: “outflanked”—“bound to retreat” . . . how often have not similar notions been made to serve for some operation or other . . . ending with entirely different results. It had been so at Verdun—and then again on the Maas: at that time the flanks had been mutually opposed—and neither had budged. He has no use for these deductions which take no account of the difficulties of the existing situation, but which would deal rather with possibilities.

Yet the King takes no notice of this silence and plunges only deeper into the network of this theory. He pictures it all so distinctly—just as he had done that morning when he had traced those first blue lines and arrows upon the map. And in imagination he is following the movements of the First Army—standing east of Rheims—as it presses south: Lindequist; Gontard; Langer—: sees it as it bears down with irresistible force across both the Mourmelons, crossing the Vesle and—joining hands with von Böhm's army divisions—going east—forces its way along the Marne, as far as Châlons. Châlons!—Châlons—that enormous deposit of munitions—in *German hands!* and he seems almost to sense how the French—eastward of this double fire coming from the north and the south—waver . . . and are undone—the very ground wrested from beneath their feet.

The picture gives him courage: he feels elated:—so far nothing is lost . . . nothing has gone wrong. The thing is to be calm and not to allow oneself to be upset by every little mishap. And so he continues, saying:—"The main thing seems to me that all these movements should be developed as soon as possible—in fact before those *over there* find time to bring up their reserves."

The Crown Prince shrugs his shoulders and thinks of the message that had come by aeroplane hours ago, bringing the earliest reports so far obtainable that day: "The enemy has since morning been bringing up all available arms from the direction of St. Meneshould."

Should he say anything about it—should he tell his father? He glances at the King's face and notes its haggard look; sees the effect of his long night of weary watching—the brave attempt to control his seething emotions and suspense: sees those eyes with their fearless look—flashing confirmation to all these convincing words as they pass across his lips—and he hesitates, considers and reflects:—

"Possibly he *may* be right—and all may still be well . . . though only for a moment: yet if I tell him—will it make matters better? After all—he

already knows what is of most importance . . . that is, *if he chooses to know it—*”

Then, in speaking, he turns the conversation into other channels, so as to fill the time of waiting—though himself anxiously concerned for the officer's return. As soon as he has heard the report he will be off, he thinks.

And here it is: a brief forerunner of the mid-day message which is to follow soon. The youthful voice is bright and business-like in tone as it now reports the latest news to the King. But, with the very best wish to take an impersonal view of the position, as one who has had his lesson well drummed into him at “the Course for Staff Officers”—this rosy-cheeked, boyish face now appears unusually serious. The brief message speaks of heavy and continuous fighting; of stubborn resistance in the area held by the enemy. It shows that the longed-for movement towards the south and south-east, calculated—it was thought—to ease the situation, has not, as yet, brought any perceptible relief to this bitter struggle on the west of the city, where—in spite of the hilly configuration of the country—the best progress seems to have been made; the opposition put up by the enemy seems, nevertheless, to have been remarkably strong and active.—Below's men are now advancing slowly and with difficulty and with regard to the Third Army, it is becoming even clearer than before, that the enemy—having knowledge of the expected attack—had intentionally withdrawn over a large area and concentrated his forces at the second position which is still intact.—Then follow some details:—particulars as to the groups and divisions; the names of places; of portions of woodland, and of hill slopes—such as have either been taken, or are still being contested.—

As the King listens to this report his features become harder and more set: the eyelids flutter nervously and he bites his lip. Then apparently everything is very much as it was—and there has been no advance anywhere!—Heavy fighting and obdurate resistance—

It seems almost as if some of what the Crown Prince had been saying might be true after all—they had got wind of the coming attack in Champagne and had retired before our first push:—But, need that imply that we have “got stuck”? He draws himself up and shakes his head: No!—it merely means that the fighting is still in progress—and one will have to see—

“Thank you—” he says now that the voice has ceased—and then he repeats once more “Thank you”—for it seems to him that he had hardly heard his own voice the first time.

Minutes go by—he is thinking—and clinging to the formula:—The beginning is always the hardest and the most difficult part; once that has been surmounted, and the first obstacles overcome, then matters will proceed at a very different pace. It was so at the battle in the Spring—as, in fact, he had just explained to the Crown Prince—of course—things would right themselves again!

He raises his eyes—before him stands the Crown Prince:—

“If you will permit me—Father, I’d like to get a move on—my Chief is expecting me—”

How weary his father’s face looked; how singularly yellow—as if the blood had left that sunburnt skin and its brown-bronze hue faded away with it.

“Certainly—of course, my boy: you are busy—and duty comes first of all. Now just see that things get straightened out again pretty soon—eh, what? And tell them in the army at Maison Rouge that I am watching things from here—have it all before my eyes—” and he pulls nervously at his gloves and looks past his son.

“Thank you, Father: then do you intend staying on? You were out here all last night—isn’t that rather too much?”—

There were no words: only a hasty shake of the head in the negative.

Then—a handshake: a nod: and a clinking of spurs.—

A few words to the gentlemen in attendance and

the Crown Prince is gone—followed by his adjutants, the Count accompanying them down the turret stairs.

The names of the villages, woods and slopes mentioned by the Staff Captain are running in his head—there seemed to be quite a number! according to these some five—even six or seven kilometres of ground must already have been secured on the south bank of the Marne. That's something, after all! and then—among the hills, and with the river behind one! The troops that have accomplished that much will do still more. . . . Of course, the thing is to keep calm and to have patience. And he seems to see the Field-Marshal before him—ponderous, square, placid and imperturbable . . . just as he had been in March, when matters had been much the same and difficult to adjust—and had he not continually said:—

“All things must ripen—everything is bound to evolve of its own initiative: A battle is a living organism: and as such can but unfold in accordance to the potentialities attaching to its innate strength—”

And yet—and yet!—It seems almost as if at the first great push and after all those stupendous preparations made during the winter—there had been in each one a *something* which now no longer seems so much in evidence:—in his own heart—and in the Leaders': in those in command—and in the men—and also at home:—the Promise of Spring?—

He ruminates—thinks:—and then suddenly calls to mind that small body of men—a mere remnant, that had been badly punished;—he had come upon them in those days, just after the push from Cambrai—on the confines of the Bourslon Forest, where poison-gas and a hail of bullets had done their worst. They had come through from the fighting about Boursies, and at Havrincourt, these men, and were all that remained. But their eyes had shone with a fever of excitement—of endurance—and with boundless faith, and to his enquiries the same cry had come from each of them:—

“*We shall pull it off!*” . . . And that was only

four months ago. *And now?*—Do not the faces often look hard and discontented? faces that are struggling with a cruel fate—showing eyes which reveal—nothing: and to the same enquiries the reply that now comes is—“We *must* pull it off, Your Majesty!—”

Must—because for all of us who are Germans there is no other way out . . . no other way than that which leads forward—to Victory—or *Must*, because the compelling force—stronger than that of the disintegrating influence of the alien sowers of discord at home—is the relentless one of a Service that is binding on them? . . . He sees their heads and forms . . . the heads and figures of grey-haired men; men whose hands he has held in his during the course of the last few weeks; men with whom he has spoken—and it seems almost as though that inherent freedom which had till now been apparent in each one, possessed them no more.

He shakes his head gently and gazes out upon things inanimate, then sees—without actually looking—how deep down below, somewhere between the broad blackish-green branches of the trees, small curiously foreshortened figures are wrapping themselves up in cloaks and scarves: putting on helmets and caps: one in a bright yellow sort of jerkin is drawing on a pilot's cap. Then they all get into the car and the yellow jerkin sits at the wheel. It is starting—the horn sounds huskily—a cross choking sound . . . then away!—

“We must pull through!” thinks the King—“We must pull through!” . . . yet, how curiously empty it sounds—just words—and nothing more. And of a sudden he feels terribly tired.—

XV

TIME creeps on.

The Medical Officer, looking serious and conscious of his responsibilities, is talking in whispers to the Colonel-General, and that officer—being entirely of the same opinion—ventures to approach his Royal Master with a suggestion—

“Why certainly—naturally—of course!—”

So it is to be “a plate of soup and a glass of wine” at noon—down below, at the foot of the tower and among the trees. A picnicking on benches, old munition boxes, and empty barrels, and amid the warm scent of moss and of sweet hay that is drying out there, somewhere on the meadows—and of newly felled wood. Conversation makes an attempt at gaiety, but there is little ease, nor yet relief; all things hang fire. Close at hand may be heard the faint ticking of the apparatus in its little cell—tapping off the messages from the Supreme Command . . . and this all goes on for about half an hour, when a start for the summit is made once more—and none can foresee the end of this business! Even the Colonel-General has by this time unbent sufficiently to exchange a look of commiseration with the other gentlemen. In front stands the King again: he is busy with the Staff Captain and the Stranger Officer, going through the particulars contained in the reports, and his blue pencil is at work putting in the lines and arrows on the map: Kathen’s Company, that accomplished the passage of the Marne, under heavy enemy fire, is now north of Lossey—and along with the Tenth Infantry Division—fighting hard at Mézy. The left wing of the division had reached Crezancy, but fallen back again: The heights south of Courtemont are being stubbornly defended by the Third American and the

Hundred and Twenty-fifth French Divisions, the outer edges have been scaled by the Thirty-sixth Infantry Division, though not yet taken. The Thirty-sixth Infantry Division of Wichura's Company reached the heights north of St. Agnan and La Chapelle. The First Division of the Guards—and so it goes on: division after division—along the entire stretch of the Front of Attack. He has got well into this work and it helps him against worrying as to information that has come through about the fighting in the hilly district about the Marne: for the enemy has not been taken unawares here either, but had met the attack fully prepared—and had withdrawn in the face of our first push, while preparing to strongly defend his second position: here he presumably intends to hold out to the last—And with this the work on the map will have been completed.

Of course—of course:—Everything here indicated by these blue lines—by these arrows, pointing southward and south-east, following the movements of Kathen, Wichura, Conta and Schmettau's Companies, proclaims success and provides ground for further successes.

And in the same way is von Below's army doing its duty, and—as far as we can see—Lindequist, Gontard and Langer's groups, along the great Roman Road, are getting forward—drawing the circle about Rheims closer and closer. . . .

The King straightens his figure: he seems well pleased and says:—"This is the first half of the day—so what more could we wish for? *Those over there* know just as well as we do what hangs in the balance—"

The Staff Captain is silent.

"A battle has to evolve of its own initiative . . ." and it seems to him as though he were repeating some strange words mechanically. Then he shakes his head and enquires abruptly:—

"Was anything said at Avesnes as to how the enemy came to know our intentions?"

"Yes, certainly, Your Majesty: the Supreme

Army Command believes that either numbers of men deserted and went into the enemy lines, at different points during the past few nights, or that particular parties—singled out for this purpose by enemy patrols—have given information. Such men can, of course, give no more than partial indications, just a few particulars—but we know ourselves what can be put together from anything of that sort. . . .”

The King is pulling at his gloves again:

“Pig-dogs!” he says between his teeth. Then he points out into the distance: “And so thousands of decent men are now bleeding over there—owing to such rascals!”

He is at the telescope again, and stands—engrossed in thought—against the high parapet, his eyes scanning the immensity of the battle-field. The afternoon sun, hot to suffocation, pours its rays down on to the parched, cracked, undulating ground, seeming to catch some gleam of the white and yellowish clay soil, and to reflect it in the sweltering maze of mist. Here and there, amidst the dull continuous roar, comes a sudden loud rattling . . . as if some giant at a distance had been engaged in pitching a load of boards to the ground . . . and then a thick column of smoke rises slowly above this brown, yellow and grey surface—wallows in its own hideous discoloration and flows on in broad, surging waves—engulfing death, agony and horror.

Unspeakable sadness lies over this scene where human life is undistinguishable—where all seems aimless and without as much as any sign of actual contest: where there is nothing to convey the object of this murderous onslaught, devastating the land.

The sight of it all, bathed in the dazzling light of the afternoon sun, is profoundly painful to the King and yet—he feels a sense of separateness. His eyes ache and he closes them for a moment: *not give in!*—and with both hands he seizes the railing—feeling the dim desire to remain on here—not to leave yet . . . to master the fatigue and weariness now fastening on him, for—that which now

possesses the entire retinue—seems now to enfold him too; to stay—to remain master of himself.

And—without acknowledging as much to himself he knows that he is still *waiting*—waiting for some news or other—news that will come from somewhere . . . anywhere . . . and which will tell him that the crisis has been surmounted—that all is settling down into its rightful course—moving forward. . . .

Once he turns round:—the Guardsman is seated on the bench at the corner of the platform: his long legs are outstretched, his head flung back—he is asleep with his mouth wide open and his narrow face looking remarkably foolish. The Count and the Professor have disappeared altogether—and Panne-mann is seated on the top step and is gravely engaged in the labour of manicure. The Colonel-General is dozing—though ostensibly in official readiness, some support being provided him by the stiff lining of his high boots, his bunched-out riding-breeches and the rigidity of his regimental coat, with its cords, decorations and gold embroideries.

Thus sunk within himself, so to speak, and with closed eyes, he nevertheless *stands*—occasionally raising an eyelid, with a brief bewildered air, then dropping it again heavily.

Beside the map-table stand the Stranger Officer and the young Staff Captain—and the King glances at the watch lying on the table, beside the map and the pencils. . . . Three o'clock. Still he waits: regarding with evident interest all he has been looking at for at least a hundred times this day out there in that distant expanse of country . . . waits on in hopes: the hand on the watch goes steadily forward—the time limit he had set is diminishing: yet nothing new. . . .

He considers:—"Would it be well to telephone to Avesnes again? get them to put him into personal communication with the General?" But he immediately dismisses the idea:—"That would only serve to give him an impression of 'unsoldierly' weakness, nervousness and uncertainty!"—And he seems to see the face of the General when he took up

the receiver and heard:—"Hullo!—Headquarters of His Majesty the King: Ménil Tower. . . . Please . . . !" and sees the look of cold amazement that would come over the strong purposeful features of that head full of a hundred official thoughts and considerations—sees those slight but evident indications of impatience. . . . No—no!—

And so the hours run on—outstripping the limit he had set—and the void remains.

It is four o'clock by the time the King turns from the parapet, and with an almost violent abruptness of manner gives his command to break up and return.—

XVI

THE arrival at the neglected old orchard at Bosmont, where the train stands, is very much the same as it was on the foregoing afternoon.

It is now six o'clock:—they have been absent nineteen hours. Their Excellencies—their countenances slightly constrained and uncertain—stand waiting in readiness to fall in with whatever mood may be that of the All Highest. They, too, have eagerly perused the reports so far obtainable, and their experience—even as civilians—tells them that, so far, these contain little to rejoice over. In any case it seems to be a much more difficult job than had been expected.

But the King, who has just shaken hands with the Chamberlain, the Admiral and the corpulent Military Chief, as also with the Civil Chief, who has joined the rest, gives the impression of being entirely satisfied with the general trend of affairs. The drive has refreshed him and the changing scenes have renewed

his spirits. His hopes are now set on the evening, when the latest reports of the day's fighting will give a more definite view as to the reaction, and—covered with dust as he is—he has in a few sparkling sentences already given an eloquent account of the fire-battle to their care-worn Excellencies, emphasising his picture with sweeping and impressive gestures.

There is nothing to denote the unrest, the anxiety, which beneath this semblance of content is yet gnawing at his heart.

His impulsive and brilliant improvisations were never better, nor more scintillating in their colours.

Yet the Chamberlain is not to be deluded by this brave show—his eye sees deeper—and he knows: “this is his way—and it cannot be otherwise with him: it is thus that he strengthened himself!” and those dark eyes, so like ripe blackberries in their brilliancy, now wear a look of sorrowful anxiety as they dart a glance at the other men of the party who are approaching from the cars, flitting across the faces of the Colonel-General and the Staff Doctor:—“How could they!—how ever could he?! nineteen hours of it—without sleep—without proper commissariat!” . . . He feels a sense of responsibility, concern as to possible after-effects, and is like some unhappy hen, whose chicks had escaped too far from her sheltering wing. His full red face—the face of a *viveur*—is eloquent with reproach and his head shakes dubiously—anxiously:—“No—no!” it implies, “His Majesty must not do this sort of thing—think of the danger to his health—surely there should have been *some way* of bringing influence to bear—?”

But the Colonel-General who—in spite of all the lurchings and minor collisions the car has endured on its homeward run—has slept like a top the whole time, now feels tolerably fit again, raises his eyes to heaven and smiles indulgently:—

“*Bring influence to bear?!—What?!—* When His Majesty won't budge from the spot—eh?!—Well—it's *his* look-out, then, isn't it?! ”

And the Chamberlain, with a sigh of understanding, admits as much:—

“Yes—yes—indeed! *à qui le dites-vous* . . . but still—”

And to the King, who has paused for a moment in his descriptive disquisition, he ventures to observe:—

“No doubt Your Majesty would like a bath at once and—should Your Majesty think well—dinner could be ready in an hour’s time.”

So the groups disperse and enter their various railway-carriages. Blinds are drawn down and batsmen busy themselves tugging at top-boots and dust-covered breeches. Shallow grey-rubber baths are filled with water and every compartment is a scene of scrubbing and the changing of garments . . . as for the battle—?

“Witte—! What the devil!—look here—! If you haven’t gone and stuck the wrong studs into this shirt!—What?!—*no!!! not those!* The others — with the Sultan’s monogram on them. . . .”

Then—at seven, all are ready, shaven and smart—like so many eggs just out of the shell—all waiting for the King in the dining-compartment and—at the same time—giving those others, who had remained behind, some discreetly murmured accounts of their experiences, impressions, and surmises—as to the prospects.

The Staff Captain is absent—he is “at it” again, of course: boxed up in that sound-proof little cell and holding the lines to Avesnes, or—collecting the coils of “tapes”—as they are disgorged by the machines.

And now the King enters—calm and, apparently, cheerful.

The plump little Automobile Officer, rubicund as if he had been boiled, and who with a modest consciousness of his own *bourgeois* origin—is standing unobtrusively near the door, receives an encouraging nod, accompanied by a friendly smile:—

"Capital! You did your job splendidly, my dear Pannemann—*quite* splendidly!"

Then, turning and shaking hands with the one-armed young Feldjäger-lieutenant who, with the mails from Berlin, has just reported himself, he says:—"Son of the *Landrat* in West Prussia, are you not?"

"The *Landrat* is my uncle, Your Majesty."

"Well then, greet him kindly from me, the next time you are writing!"

All are now seated at the table, and it is much as usual . . . though *not quite so*—: there is a certain weariness, a sense of fatigue—some subjects are tacitly avoided—and there is brooding suspense. It feels almost as if someone were lying sick—not far away.

Yet the King—striving against all this—talks:—He dilates on all the events and happenings of the night and the now waning day: little episodes are touched on in his characteristic and lively manner:—there was an aerial encounter, high up above Nauroy, of which he had been able to follow all the details with his glass. Then, there was that wonderful feat of crossing the Marne under heavy enemy fire at Dormans—a glorious piece of unforgettable work—without its equal in the history of the war!

And their Excellencies listen full of interest.

The Prince nods his head; his watery eyes have a dull glint, and—as one inspired—he remarks:—

"Yes—well: this business of the Marne—should, I take it, make a distinct impression on the gentlemen in Paris—"

"I beg your pardon?—"

"What I mean, Your Majesty, is—it should make them feel a bit sick, the French, you know . . . because—well—ah—because of its being the Marne—eh, what?"

The Civilian Chief gently lowers his eyes and studies the dessert-plate in front of him; never before has the gilt meandering design bordering the edge of the little plate seemed of such absorbing interest . . . but, *within himself*, the Chief smiles

broadly and thinks: "And such things can actually happen!"—

Now and again while talking the King gives a glance to where the Staff Captain usually sits: the chair is empty. He must be receiving the evening reports thus, at the same time, completing the general picture—as given on the map . . . in readiness for the statements to be made to him later on. . . .

"Yes: and to think of all they are having to put into the field now *over there!* Why, Böhm has taken prisoners belonging to the Third American and the Eighth Italian Divisions!—and it has been stated that von Einem's army has taken some Americans too!"

The Colonel-General, who to-night is sitting at the other side of the table and next to the Prince, remarks genially—he has a way of first chewing his words, so to speak:—

"Those vaunted Reserves of Foch's don't seem to be so inexhaustible after all as the French Press would have us believe."

Then the King knocks the ash of his cigarette and observes:—

"The French have begun to bring up their Reserves to engage Below: Two massed divisions have been located: the Forty-fifth in the wooded hills above Rheims and the Twenty-seventh in the territory about M'ourmelon le Grand: these will probably soon be brought into action too: well—our men are only waiting for them—and will soon show them. . . !"

There is a pause: all feel slightly uncomfortable in face of this dauntless confidence—yet no one considers himself called upon to make any remark.

Puffs of smoke come blowing in from without: a Hospital train is slowly passing along the adjacent line of rails—it seems endless. . . . The King is drumming on the table with his fingers and gazing into space—out and beyond the present. . . .

The Admiral's eyelids flicker: he has the appearance of a grey owl; he is slowly compressing his

lipless mouth and moves uneasily in his chair. The papers, deposited between the seat and his own person, rustle and resolves which have been suggesting themselves now seek expression:—" Might it not be as well for him to approach His Majesty *now* with the latest ' U ' -boat reports?" and, while his right hand feels for the papers, he gets his wind up, sits at ease and—

But at this very moment the Staff Captain appears in the doorway—his hands full of sheets to which are pasted the telegraphic strips; with notices and with maps. . . .

He is already beside the King's chair.

" Does Your Majesty desire to-night's reports from the battle-front? "

" Yes: certainly—" and the King's features have changed in an instant. They have taken on a drawn and hungry expression and the hand on the table trembles slightly:—" Now we shall see! " he thinks. " Now it must have become evident! "

Heads are bent forward—alert and listening: there is hardly a sound about the long table—and the clear voice proceeds to read:—

Again the interminable list of army after army; section after section; divisions—places—woods—heights—

The King gives a quick nod from time to time, throwing in a word, breathlessly—abruptly—

It seems to be true that down on the Marne—and to the west of Rheims—some advance has been made, as the result of stiff fighting, and the newly acquired line has been strengthened and improved: but—one thing seems certain; namely that, with regard to these sectional encounters, the fight is still one for the enemy's second position—and the opposition put up is strong: moreover it is here that the decision must lie. . . . There is a silence. Hard, ashen, gaunt is the expression of the King's face: it is as though the minutes had aged and withered him.

The Staff Captain adds:— " The reports from the other Fronts are still in process of coming in—"

But the King hardly hears him: what he sees is

that the weight and impetus of our storming party, after its first dash forward, will be up against a wall, where it must break, and go under in disruption—losing its best forces—unless it should succeed in speedily overcoming the opposition.

Then, that final sentence, mentioning the “general impression” comes to his mind—“it is here that the decision must lie.” With unseeing eyes he gazes into space. Everything lies in the balance: then he drops his eyelids . . . the presence of people about him has become distressing—even these heads seem now to have something distorted about them . . . there is the “Owl”—and the Chamberlain is looking just like a big red parrot . . . then there is the white-headed old Falcon . . . and he is sensible of a feeling of revulsion against the presence of them all!—He would have no eyes resting on him now—he would be alone. . . .

He moves his head—tries to rid himself of the thought—meditates a return to the observation tower.

He reflects:—“And only yesterday I thought—it will have been decided by to-morrow! *Yesterday*—less than twenty-four hours ago—here at this table and among these very men—”

“Have you the map of the situation?” he asks, and then—as the young Captain is about to unfold it, he says:—“No, thank you; later on—over there.”

“Does Your Majesty desire to hear the Army Reports?”

“Army Reports? oh, yes! we may as well hear them—” and he nods:—

The voice then proceeds again—

“A few insignificant advances have been made by Rupprecht, to the south-west of Ypres and on the Lys: There has been some local firing about the Aisne: A lieutenant accounted for thirty-five of the enemy.” (Message ends.)

And this is what people at home will be reading in their evening papers at about this same hour; reading it as more or less of a habit by this time and,

more or less, with a sense of boredom . . . yet knowing *nothing—nothing—nothing—!* And the *Berliner Tageblatt* will print the name of Lieutenant Loëvenhaupt in capitals—because the editor will have underlined it, and—for aught anyone knows—he may be a Jew! Nor are they aware, as they push their paper aside, that at seven or eight hundred kilometres distance from them the decision is hurrying to a close—that the dice proclaiming "*To be or not to be*" may already have been cast—and that many thousands of their brothers are lying torn and mangled about that distant scene. . . .

Some sense of this great gulf which, more profoundly than all space, separates those at home from those on the field of battle, now comes upon him, filling his heart with deep unrest: he looks up at the clock:

"Half-past eight! "

"Half-past eight! Just about the time when I was walking across the meadows yesterday evening with the Count—and the bull-frogs were croaking. . . . What was I talking about then? whatever was it? Ah, yes: of my youth. . . ."

He feels a sense of oppression—as though things were coming upon him from every side—things inimical. . . .

"Yes! the map! " as though he had suddenly remembered: and rising, he gives a friendly inclination of the head to the assembled men—and takes his cap. Then, beckoning to the Staff Captain to accompany him, he strides past his suite—now standing erect—towards the door. Away down the long narrow passages, past the four or five carriages which comprise the living compartments: the waning daylight, coming through the large window-panes, falls on the many photographs and mementoes with which these passages are embellished: many a snapshot of happier days: of trips in the North Sea: of the "*Hohenzollern*"—of the Gala-week at Kiel and of the Regatta at Cowes. Of reunions at Donaueschingen and at Wilhelmshoehe and at Konopischt . . . at the Saalburg and Hohkoenigsburg—

Far—far away is now all this—! both the events and the people— He glances across to the siding: a couple of the higher officials, attached to the Cabinets, are now taking the air. They are estimable and worthy old working-animals, who during the day bide in their hutches groping among documents; deciphering telegrams, or writing codes—seldom visible. Now they are unburdening their hearts to each other—probably about their Chiefs—or spinning yarns, according to their kind.

The King bows—

How clear and bright it still is outside—how long the days are. . . . *And the nights.*

XVII

THE King is seated at his writing-table, and the map with the latest additional markings lies before him.

The Staff Captain, who in the interval has received further reports, stands beside him—waiting.

The light of the lamp falls on the blue lines—curves and arrows, drawn about what was hitherto enemy territory. The position has, it is true, improved about the Marne and in the wooded country, but in the Champagne districts the line drawn at noonday remains unaltered and to this section the King now points, saying:—

“Have you any news as to what is happening here?”

“Yes, Your Majesty; an attempt is still being made there: the Twelfth, the First Bavarian and the Sixteenth Army Corps are to attack there again to-night . . . it remains to be seen—”: there is not much that is hopeful in all this. The King nods: yes—“it remains to be seen,” and a feeling of great

fatigue and discouragement comes over him: he leans back and stares up at the light.

The young officer now reads the other reports from the West Front:—that there has been no more than a passing Artillery duel with the Eighteenth Army Corps: that the Fourth—on the south-east of Loker—has turned aside some patrols: that about the Kemmel district, as well as in the Bailleul sector, the enemy fire has been particularly heavy: and so it goes on . . . the Sixth, Ninth, Seventeenth Armies: the Fifth and the Nineteenth; and, in between, the Army Divisions from the Sea Front to the Swiss Frontier.—

The King listens to it all, as, indeed, he has done every evening—now for years past. His thoughts are busy with that space between the Marne and the Argonne—but a small section, when compared to the huge line in its entirety, and yet *now* the heart of the whole. He hears the words—but they are just mere words; it seems rather, as if someone were hitting him with a blunt hammer.

The Staff Officer has a fresh sheet in his hand and the voice goes on with its recitation—on, over the King's weary senses, weary to the point of pain. Soldierly and exact is the voice: stating, reporting—unmoved.

“On the south-west Front: further attacks east of the Brenda have failed, but the enemy suffered heavily. Eastward of Pertica fighting is still in progress. There is nothing fresh from Albania.”

The King passes his hand across his brow:—Albania!—Hecuba—!

“Obost: at Sassitza—”

For a few moments the King closes his eyes. . . .

“Macedonia: No particular occurrences.—

“Scholz: to the east of the Dobropolje and in the Zborsko district, enemy guerrilla detachments have been repulsed. South of Gjeogjeli there has been some skirmishing among the patrols; lively Artillery fire about the Moglena district and to the east of the Vardar.”

Foes—he thinks—foes on every side—so that we can hardly breathe the air!—while he feels with a choking sense of bitterness that all is personally directed against him. Some spiteful plot, calculated to harm him—rather than the country or the people—*him*—his work—his heritage, confided to him, and for which he is bound to render an account—to his ancestors—as much as to those who are yet to follow after him.

And the unconcerned young voice reads on:—

“Turkish Seat of War: Some three hundred Armenians have been repulsed on the Front by the Fifth Infantry Division of the Eastern Army Group. In the district west of Assin . . .”

But the King shakes his head gently and raises a hand to interrupt the discourse: it is getting unbearable—an end to it!

The papers rustle; someone takes up the map, folds it, and a voice asks:—“Has Your Majesty any further commands?”

A wordless reply in the negative.

“And for to-morrow?”

“We will wait until the first reports come in;—the night may clear up many uncertainties . . . and possibly you may hear direct from the gentlemen at Avesnes to-morrow.”

“Yes—certainly, Your Majesty.”

A second more, then—a quick click of the heels—a salute—and he is gone.

The King is alone. He sits immovable and listens to the retreating footsteps, becoming more and more dim in the distance—finally ceasing altogether.

A weight of fatigue lies on him and he thinks:—“No wonder! after last night’s vigil—after the suspense . . . and this experience—” He turns to the clock: only a little past nine, and the men over in the dining-compartment are probably just settling down to a game at Bridge—or are thinking of a glass of Punch, by way of a nightcap. Shall he force himself to take a stroll outside—perhaps with the Civil Chief? He need only extend his hand to

touch the electric button and summon old Schulz . . . but no—.

The State Documents?—his eye rests on the pile of yellow portfolios, the contents of which await his endorsements and signature.

Shall he go to bed—? sleep . . . or at all events—try to sleep?

And again—as before in the dining-saloon—he shrinks at the mere anticipation of another long night . . . lying in the little compartment, powerless; condemned to senseless waiting, while—out there the decision is approaching its final fulfilment.

A sense of repugnance, fear and dislike of all these narrow, separate and confined spaces now comes upon him—the loneliness of them!

The very walls are enemies ready to seize on him, fetter him, choke him—so close and straight! they are prisons and cells where one must struggle in agonizing frenzy, held fast by the chain of an unescapable past: in which one chafes, while ever feeling and seeking after some escape such as may, perhaps, lead into a future—still veiled from sight. . . . *Everyone?*—No—just *he* . . . *he alone*:—and again his thoughts turn to those others, over there. Whatever they may have to bear, they have at all events always *someone* of their own circle, someone standing on the same level as themselves, to whom they can turn in their trouble; before whom they need lose none of their dignity—even when throwing off their last reserve and laying bare their wounds. And the King stares out over that small circle and out beyond it and thinks: “I have none—and may have none: For a barrier has been erected between me and whoever may stand next: since I, by God’s Almighty Grace, am King over that other. The *one* who by Him has been chosen; whom He has loaded with this heavy weight of office and responsibility, yet to whom is also given the strength to find the right way—to take it—and to lead others: He gave this to one who would be but a vain fool, an inconceivable adventurer, did he not believe in God’s Mercy and in the Divine Meaning of his mission:

the Meaning, that the Lord, ruling in Wisdom over all, has selected him, so that he may be an instrument to lead these millions of humanity according to His Will.”—

And the words of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans come into the ‘King’s mind as a revelation, a help and a support:—

“For there is no authority without God; but where there is authority, it has been ordained by God.”

Then his thoughts feel their way back to that barrier—the barrier set up dividing him from those others:—

“I, from whom, therefore, the privilege has been withheld of laying bare my sorrows—my agonies to others, who in these dark hours can but raise my solitary prayer—as did the Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane—submissively imploring, while others sleep—‘My Father, if it be possible, may this Cup pass from me: yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.’”

With a deep sigh the King rises from his seat—wearily, heavily. Yes: whatever it may be that shall happen—it is the Finger of God—and His Will. As he opens the door to his sleeping-compartment his old servant stands before him—ready to assist. Without a word the ponderous old man helps the King to divest himself of his garments—quiet and careful in every movement is old Schulz; a silent, faithful servitor, who knows but one law—the welfare of his Master.

And now the King is alone again: a little well-thumbed book lies on the table beside his bed. He has it always with him, wherever he may be. The leaves are yellow and the print faded: he used to read it continually when a boy. His grandfather, of revered memory, had given it him on the day on which he was confirmed, saying:—“Keep this in reverence, and—be it in days of happiness or sorrow—turn to it in true humility, for in it is everything the human heart shall need for its comfort and uplifting.”

And now he takes the little book and opening at random, reads— He reads for no more than a few

minutes, yet every word, every sentence seems to greet him as a friend, and a feeling of rest comes over him—a transmutation of this wisdom born of sorrow, stilling his weariness.

He can scarcely keep his eyes open . . . then he lays the small book aside—and his eyes close—

Heavy sleep comes over him and enshrouds him for some hours.—

XVIII

ONCE he starts up with a shock.
Someone is standing before him . . .
Uncle Bertie.

The King's heart beats like a hammer: it takes a few moments for him to be able to reassure himself. It is night—darkness everywhere—it must be a dream.

Half raised, and leaning on his elbow, he listens—within and about him—puts his hand out over the coverlet.

Uncle Bertie;—just as he remembers him at their last meetings—at Wilhelmshoehe and Homburg: and then he suddenly calls to mind—why! the original of this picture is one of those countless snapshots hanging in little frames all along the corridors of the train! He must have glanced at it to-night as he was coming from the dining-saloon—yet, *no*: he had avoided it and—yet—here it is invading his dreams.

How plainly he can see it now: it was taken at Kronberg, in the summer of 1908. Uncle Bertie was smacking his lips then, for only two months earlier, he, in all secretness, and with the help of Hardinge and that scoundrel, Isvolski, had been getting at Nicky, at Reval; intriguing, so as to get him to join the Triple Entente—

And he continues his train of thought, pulsating with excitement:—

“He—he—is the cause of all this misery! he it is, who pursued me with his hatred; who, wherever he could, spoke evil of me and placed obstructions in my way . . . doing so, too, for more than twenty years!” And a red wave of anger rises in his heart—he can feel the heat of it—feels the hot, choking rage that has come over him: rage and shame and bitterness, as he senses once more all the secret struggles he had had to wage with his Uncle—sees it—cannot escape it, nor cast it from him. While, too, at the same time, he seems aware that—fundamentally—the opposition was a purely personal one. English Politics?—*he* had never stood in their light.—While—economically—or where the balance of Power was concerned—? What nonsense! there was, in fact, nothing about which we might not have come to terms.

“The thing was this: that he hated me! and, therefore, made it his aim to oppose me at every turn. He did so as Prince of Wales, and equally so, later—as King. Never—never—did he forget. He could not forgive that I had been in a position to take up my work while in the full vigour of my strength: that I could make good my position while yet young; raising my country to proud eminence as a power in the world—while he, who was so much the elder, was obliged to stand aside behind the aged Queen.”

And the King, sinking back again on to his pillows, reviews in his bitterness those bygone years, during which that corpulent old man had, with so much eager business activity, added mesh to mesh of the net constructed for the purpose of his isolation—until the wicked pastime became the dearest enjoyment of his venomous later days. How he had enticed, flattered and threatened—until he had got them all—one after the other: set them against Germany—against him and his work.

And now he lies still staring at these pictures of

the past as they come before him in the dark, and thinks:—

“That was my mother’s brother: blood of my own blood!”

Then a phrase occurs to him—one he himself had formerly been in the habit of using:—“Blood is thicker than water!” But he shakes his head quickly—no, indeed! That had not counted where he was concerned, for in his case, it had been *hate* that had been stronger than blood!—and he senses almost perceptibly, how a line of thought he had started days ago—or was it only yesterday?—no, it was the evening before—crosses this present flow of worrying recollections, breaking in, and—as it were—becoming one with it. His blood now surges more hotly than before: his throat is dry, and he gulps in his excitement of recognition. . . . “Was it not the same thing in the case of my mother—his sister . . . the same as it had been with my father?!—Evil envy, and hatred. The mother, who here, had had to wait—wait—wait; with her yearning gaze fixed on the throne: a prey to unsatisfied ambitions . . . only to reach it for a short three months—and when her youth was over. And then, the envy of her brother, who at sixty-five years of age was still Prince of Wales, and who was incapable of forgiving me, his nephew, for attaining—while still young—to what was withheld from his impatient grasp—!”

The King lies immovable: mentally he is struggling to gain rest, to rid himself of these thoughts and to escape the torture of all these troubles, unearthed from a dead past.

Sleep—only to be able to sleep for a few hours! For the morrow will need strength.

He closes his eyes, trying to escape these pictures—trying to force himself to think of nothing. Then—as he lies there—he becomes conscious of a faint ticking, knocking and hammering—as though in the far distance. It has the sound of heavily falling drops, descending one after the other—one after the other. And he knows that these sounds come from

the telegraph-wagon hard by; that they glide off the machine, with the white finger-board and the spools of endless paper ribbons—on which voices from the battle-front speak: drops which, like letters, resolve themselves into words and sentences . . . into hope and doubt—and final certainty.

He listens to the ticking for some time—struggles against the desire to rise, go to it—and read; and—at the same time—knows that this struggle is a mere trick of his overwrought nerves; that he would, in fact, rather retain this uncertainty than exchange it for actual knowledge . . . be it good, or—perhaps otherwise.

And so his senses become drowsier—and the distant ticking—knocking and hammering more dim . . . till he finally sinks to sleep again.—

XIX

EARLY next morning, before breakfast, he summoned the Staff Captain to his study, and the first glance at the young officer's face—before a word had been spoken—seemed to bode no good.

Seated, and gazing down fixedly on the map, the King listens to the news.

The big attacks, undertaken with strong reinforcements, and continued till well into the night—with the object of relieving the pressure on the west wing and giving renewed mobility to the frontal section of the Army in Champagne—had failed. Heavy losses have been sustained, the troops are held up in front of the second position—nothing has been achieved. South of the Marne, and south-west of Rheims, the enemy—with the aid of heavy fire and bomb attacks, had spent his energies against our bridges across the Marne—but

no new success of any importance had been recorded there either.

The sound of the little gold clock, ticking on the writing-table, alone disturbs the silence.

The King moves his head:—

“Well—things seem hardly cheerful!” and the voice sounds forced, as though speaking were a difficulty.

“No—Your Majesty.”

Then the King thinks:—“It is as the Crown Prince told me yesterday—” and he sees his son’s face again as he saw it then—youthful and anxious, looking out into the distance; his son, who for some time past had lost faith in a victory of arms, and he hears the words again: *Verdun . . . and stuck fast!*—

And now? and now!—

He feels as if some bottomless pit were opening at his feet . . . as though some black Power were reaching out to seize upon him—and he struggles passionately to free himself from it.

“Have you called up Avesnes?”

“Yes, Your Majesty—I did so half an hour ago: the Quartermaster-General is for speaking to the Chief of the Army Group, as well as the Heads of the armies in the field, and hearing their opinions. He will then consult with the Field-Marshal this morning as to whether—in view of the situation that has now arisen—it would be well to adhere to his original plan or—or modify this to meet existing circumstances—”

The King does not move, but his lips assume a faint and bitter smile. Then, after a pause, and with a burst of dry irritability unusual in him, he says:—

“*Modify—to ‘meet existing circumstances’!* . . . do I run my head against a wall and then reflect as to whether I shall modify my action to ‘suit the circumstances’? or, is this not so?!”—Silence.

As he stands before the King the young officer feels acutely troubled and distressed: surely it were better for His Majesty not to speak thus! his

soldierly discipline, his admiration of the two great Leaders at Avesnes rises in arms, as it were, and he longs to speak—though he well knows that it is not for him to make any remark. Still—censure, such as His Majesty has just seen fit to utter, well . . . after all, the matter is not quite so simple as that!

And the King meanwhile reflects:—" Shall I go over? See them? Ask to have some definite account of the affair given me? "

And then he feels that this cannot be done: neither his pride, nor his dignity will allow of it: no—nor even that dark fear, which he now can hardly face. . . .

So he asks:—" Has the General proposed any plans for me to-day? "

The Staff Captain is standing erect again:—

" I spoke to ' One-A,' Your Majesty—for he being on the spot, is entirely within the picture, as it were, and the General was at the moment holding the line to Charleville, and he said the gentlemen at Avesnes had taken for granted that Your Majesty would be going out to the watch-tower at Mélin again to-day—that is, should Your Majesty have given no other commands. They observed that the watch-tower is of all the safe positions the very best for obtaining a comprehensive view. . . . " But the King puts out his hand with an abrupt gesture—and the young officer is silent.

Yet the King's inward struggle continues: bitterly does he rebel against this exclusion—this pushing aside of him . . . it is presumption on the part of those over there . . . a neglect of the requisite display of duty—a want of tact in their treatment of himself—their King, their Supreme War Lord! assigning to him the part of a super—a lay-figure—or some mere onlooker!

So it is to be the " box " again! the " Royal Box "—away from the danger zone . . . as though he had ever asked for safety! No: in plain language it means this:—*Be so good as to keep out of our way for the present! either boxed-up in your cell in the train, at Bosmont, or—in your other open-*

air one in the woods near Mélin-Lépinois; the one that measures three square metres on top and rises twenty-five metres above the earth: you will be quite safe there, and can disturb nobody—which is another advantage—

“Very well! ” the words escape him like a short, quick cry:—we will motor over there after breakfast! ”

And in an hour's time the grey cars are tearing along over the roads once more.

XX

TO the King this drive appears endless.

The sun is blazing down on to the dust-laden road: the chalk blows about like some faint powder in the air; it sticks to nose and mouth, making streaks that look like stale porridge, and faces assume the semblance of grim death-masks.

The withered trees along the way languish beneath this grey-brown incrustation; they seem suffocated, dead under its covering; misery's last word has reduced all things to weariness—to a dying-down beneath the tread of these grim, pitiless times—the straggling villages—the people—all—

No consolation—no sign of light—no prospect relieves the deep oppression now weighing on his mind, and—boundless, as in hopeful times had appeared to him the possibilities of success—is now his agonized anxiety, his grief and his unrest.

One thought stands out before all others:—

“What is to be the end? what is going to happen? ” and he can find no answer to his cry: his teeth are set; he feels how powerless he is to do or act—to force the Hand of Fate of his own initiative—*A King!*—and he stares out ahead into the greyness, thinking:—“If they but knew!—those

millions—out there—in the trenches, and those other millions at home, to whom that word appears as the sum total of all power . . . ” and all this time he is on the verge of collapse from sheer distraction.

And now he is raising his right hand again and again, almost mechanically in greeting—nodding and saluting: they are passing Army Service wagons, one mass of grey filth; stretchers, upon which, beneath cloaks and blankets, lie shapeless forms . . . ; then Surgeons, and Nursing Sisters . . . a Lazarette—

And yet, the picture created by all this impinges but faintly on his consciousness, so leaden is the weight of anxieties now bearing down on him.

What is it to be? what is going to happen?!

Still, outwardly he assumes the cloak he has worn so long; the mask of assurance and of confidence is about the bronzed face, and the hand rises continuously in royal graciousness to the rim of the grey-covered helmet saluting—saluting—saluting. . . .

And then at length, towards eleven o'clock, the cars enter the wood again above which rises the slender scaffolding of the watch-tower. As he steps from the car he feels the necessity of ridding himself of all that is pressing upon him—the heavy air, the mildew and decay, to breathe anew the resin, mould and sawdust. . . .

“What may these hours bring?” he thinks:—
“How different to when I came last night—”

A Rittmeister, Cavalry Officer of Landwehr, reports himself—“in all humility”—for duty in attendance on His Majesty: “curled and scented,” as if straight from the barber’s shop. A smooth-skinned, “cheesy-faced” individual, who looks as if he “had gone the pace”; got up in patent-leather boots and with the St. John’s Cross stitched to the breast of his uniform. Herr von So-and-So; sent hither by the Army Staff, to be at His Majesty’s disposal.

Very well—he is scarcely listening: is merely

aware of something that makes a curious impression—some queer turn-out.

Then again the ascent to the top, but a sense of repugnance, of disinclination and obstruction seems to dog his every step.

All is the same as it was yesterday, only heavier, closer, mistier. There lies the map spread out on the little table, and there is the tripod with the telescope—all as before. There too, in the background, are the gentlemen in attendance, grouping themselves about the bench—all the same thing over again!

A feeling of bitterness seems almost to choke him—at this moment presumably, those at Avesnes are sitting together in wise consultation; breaking their heads as to how they are going to drag the cart out of the ditch! Or—have they once more concocted some new and infallible recipe—some “cure-all”?

He clenches his teeth:—“And *this—this*—is the part in affairs they assign to me—the King—the Supreme War Lord! They are kind enough to inform me—or even *not* inform me—just as may suit them best!” And he clenches his right hand on the slender rail with so much passion and vigour that it bends and cracks—

He gazes out into the wide: they are shooting again: now here, now there—without any particular connection, and it seems but half-hearted and aimless, as if labouring under the stress of partial exhaustion:—Why go on? The thing can’t be done—

He knows every part of the area now, even the tiniest:—knows them all by heart; is bored and sick of them!

And all the time he is fighting one idea as he stares out into that far-away grey Hell; fighting against the ever recurring, unescapable thought that *there—there*—in the mud and slime—in the churned-up mine-holes, and the ditches and the trenches—lie *they*—are lying there with their bodies torn and gaping; with crushed and broken limbs; staring with glazed, unseeing eyes upward at the

blazing sun—thousands upon thousands of them and—for nothing! for nothing!

“And in my name and at my call have they gone to their death!”

Away—away—with these torturing pictures! and he makes an attempt to turn his thoughts into other channels, but is caught and held fast again. The proximity of all these people is above all things odious to him in this hour of agony: it is as though he stood here bared to all prying eyes, and the close presence of the exquisite Cavalry Officer of Landwehr seems additionally irksome—not to say physically unpleasant. He shrugs his shoulders and—while only partially turning his head—enquires, somewhat ungraciously:—

“Where is the officer who was here yesterday! the Captain?”

“My comrade has had to report himself to his division, Your Majesty, they are being sent forward in this push. . . . He left early this morning for the Front, Your Majesty. . . .”

“Is that so . . . a fine fellow—!”

The exquisite individual remains in position for a few moments longer, his elbow at the correct angle, his hand upraised—and waits:—Then the arm sinks to his side again: apparently His Majesty has no further commands for him at present.

The silence is becoming oppressive.

Turning to the young Staff Officer the King asks:—

“Were they to ring up here! or are you to inform them of our arrival?” There is not much in the actual words, but the tone in which they are spoken betrays the sense of indignity beneath which he is smarting.

The Staff Captain descends to the depths.

Well, now something will be forthcoming. . . .

He is looking pale and used-up; every movement betokens his state of nervous tension. He is beset with torments such as he can now barely disguise. Over in the east, on the edge of the horizon, blurred by a cloudy yellow haze, a mine is exploding—

throwing up masses of black, then swathed in high columns of smoke, and the King, jerking forward his chin, says:—"Surely something seems to be going on again in the Tahure district. . . ."

The individual with the St. John's Cross is standing with his head bent forward—his hand to the brim of his helmet:—"As Your Majesty is pleased to remark—!"

"Or is it not perhaps in the Py Valley? or, possibly, Somme-Py?"

"As Your Majesty suggests—most probably Somme-Py. . . ."

"Or—St. Marie-Py?"

"Certainly, Your Majesty. I, too, have the impression now that it must be St. Marie-Py!"

Slowly the King looks back across his shoulder—fixing the other with his eyes for several seconds with cold and distant eyes; then, with a slight movement of the head, he asks:—

"Do you see yonder cloud that's almost shaped like a camel?"

Then, as the Rittmeister gazes at him with foolish enquiring features, he dismisses him with an icy:—

"Thank you. I shall need your services no longer."

He hears steps that are uncertain retiring from behind him: presumably the Rittmeister is about to seek the counsel of the Colonel-General. But the King—staring in front of him—thinks:—

"Like some fool, whom none dare contradict . . . with whom all are bound to agree!" and rage and bitterness well up within him. The dialogue between Hamlet and Polonius comes to his mind:—

H.—Do you see yonder cloud, that's almost in shape like a camel?

P.—By the Mass, and 'tis like a camel, indeed.

H.—Methinks, it is like a weasel.

P.—It is backed like a weasel.

H.—Or, like a whale?

P.—Very like a whale.

And his lips are compressed to a narrow line as he thinks:—

“And this is what they dare in my case! . . .”

He hears the steps of the Colonel-General approaching—cautiously: but though he does not look round, he shakes his head abruptly and in the negative. At this moment he feels a contempt for them all—what he wants is, quiet—quiet! So, with extreme caution; gingerly, and tiptoeing from one leg to the other, the old officer retires, and—as the glances of the other gentlemen meet his, he raises his hand reassuringly, yet lowering his head between his shoulders, as much as to convey:—“No—nothing can be attempted—for the present.” And then he turns to where the Rittmeister stands—for whom these words have been but so much Greek—feeling uncertain, not to say helplessly snubbed, and sends that officer about his business with a few curt and commonplace phrases and a particularly chilly look . . . he, who has been dreaming of High Recognition for his war-services—the bestowal—who might say?—of the “Hohenzollern”!—

A grey, invisible load seems to rest on all the men; for the face, the words and gestures of the Sovereign Lord are significant omens for their status and well-being in the world, and—as he is to-day—they cannot remember him, even on the darkest days that have obtained during these past years. Misgivings as to some dire misfortune; forebodings as to the cruel hand of fate, depress all of them. Can this be a mishap, such as many another?—No: the whole thing wrecks of imminent disaster—points to some bitter ending—

The long Guardsman is simply furious, and—according to his simple creed, says:—“God forsaken mess! the whole business!!”—

The Count nods, silently and attentively, in response to the charming accounts the Staff Medical Officer is giving with regard to the Buddhist Conception of the Universe. Indeed, this gentleman seems to treat his subject almost in the spirit of a

gourmet: his sentences are polished, his voice low:—"The true kernel," he murmurs, "the deepest and innermost being of all that which exists, is Nothing: from Nothing and by Nothing has Be-ing be-come, and into Nothing must it again return: just as it has been No-thing from the Beginning. . . ."

The air seems to scintillate with a dry searching glow: the firing sounds dull and heavy in the distance.

How long the Captain seems, to be sure! and the King drums the fingers of his right hand impatiently on the railings:—

"Of course; it is but natural that the gentlemen at Avesnes should be in no particular hurry—indeed, why should they be?! *He* has time—he can wait therefore!"—

Greater and greater becomes his bitterness against both. He calls to mind the first Minister of War; also the former Chief of the Military Cabinet—the predecessor of the fat one: he thinks, too, of the earlier Civil Chief—of the Admiral—! All of these had warned him against placing too much power in the hands of these two: all had set themselves against these far-reaching plans, which were for staking everything on the cast of the dice: plans, in which, the executants—carried away by the bold belief of the triumph of a good cause—had over-estimated the extent of their own powers. His position had lain between these two groups: talked over by the partisans, first of one side, now of the other, and he had—after a hard struggle—finally trusted those on whom the faith of the whole Empire was placed: the Field-Marshal and the General.—

There is a slight movement beside him—he starts and looks up; it is the Captain. The young face looks pale and serious; his teeth chatter and the papers shake, as he fingers them nervously, with tremulous hands. The King only raises his chin, with a questioning movement. Then, with his eyes downcast, and fixed on the white papers he is holding, the young officer makes his report. The tone

is low and constrained and the voice seems choking. What he has to say need not reach far—his words are for the King alone:—

“I have been speaking to the Quartermaster-General myself, Your Majesty, and the information he has given me is the outcome of the consultation that has just ended. The Supreme Army Command finds itself confronted by the fact that the attempts to make any further advance in Champagne have been without success. The question that, therefore, now presents itself is whether—in view of the inadequate structural conditions, to say nothing of the state of physical fatigue obtaining among the troops, it would seem wise to seek another decisive action—such as would doubtless call for further heavy sacrifices. Or, whether it might not be better to waive all thoughts of further attack here, contenting themselves with defending the improved position that has so far been achieved. And, since they can hardly rely on these severely punished fighting divisions having sufficient strength left to make such an effort effective, they have already decided to desist from any further attacks being undertaken by the First and the Third Armies; to withdraw these worn-out divisions of attack and to reconstruct both the armies of von Einem and von Below for purposes of defence—”

And the Captain is silent.

The King nods: his head is shaking as if seized with a palsy: the muscles about his temples and his cheeks move convulsively: his lips part, but give forth no more than a hard gasp—

“Over!” he thinks. “Over—and done with. . . . Failure! for anything that is left after this collapse of the entire undertaking is but piece-work . . . senseless and futile, when measured against the object that has been at stake—”

Then the voice of the young officer—a voice vibrant with the anguish of this hour—becomes audible again:—

“As against this, it has been determined to continue carrying out the attack south of the Marne and

in the hilly country around Rheims—" but the King raises his hand with a fluttering, negative gesture:—

"To what end? to what end?—so that to gain a few kilometres of this accursed soil thousands more may die—and pay the price?!—and—possibly—later on, to assume the defensive here too?—Is not all this madness?!—surely it was all to have been brought to a close?—Was it not *peace* that was to have been wrung from the enemy with all the strength that now remained—?"

He stares out into the rising clouds of dense red-brown mist; hears the heavy thundering rolls—the hammering of the machine-guns . . . and he seems to hear the repetition of those words: *the Supreme Army Command is confronted by the fact . . . and "such and such" is the question—impersonal—cold—as though hardly participating in the matter; as if the men in whose hands now rests his and his Empire's fate were content—now that all is tottering—to leave him in the lurch . . . entrenching themselves—as it were—behind the inflexible masks of mere formulæ—and he gasps out:—*

"The General . . . did he say anything about giving me some account of the measures he is about to undertake in conformity with this new situation?" . . .

The papers rustle again between the trembling fingers, and the answer is—"N—no, Your Majesty. The only other thing the Quartermaster-General bade me acquaint Your Majesty with was that he would send another report in the course of the evening respecting the situation south of the Marne, which threatens to become very difficult. . . ."

"*This too. . . ?!*"

The King has seized the bar of the iron railing in both hands: ashen-grey in the tumult of his emotions, he stares out over the void.

This too:—and only two days since—only just forty-eight hours ago—this man, with whom he was then speaking, had bolstered up his hopes with

assurances and confessions of confidence . . . and again he seems to hear the hard dry voice:

"*The Army of von Below pushes south. . . .*"

"*And now?!—over and past!—a world has swung round upon its axis in the course of these last two days!—what was thought to be safe, now lies shattered . . . and still this man—in his presumption—his arrogance—deems it neither necessary, nor worth while to come to me . . . or to ask me to go to him!*"—

His teeth are set: only to have a free hand now!—to be able to show them all!—Dark fantastic pictures obtrude themselves on him—they seek to drag him along with them . . . but he shakes them off: a voice somewhere at his side is saying:—

"Has Your Majesty any further commands for me?"—

With an almost imperceptible movement of the head the King responds in the negative. His unseeing eyes still cling to that distant void, though unable to escape the chaos of his restless thoughts.

It seems to him as if all this were quite unreal—no actual experience. For—did he not stand here—*here*, on this very spot—his heart replete with faith and confidence—that night of the great battle—witness to the terrible horror of that drum-fire? Here—as never before—in the very innermost depths of his soul—had he not prayed, raising his heart in passionate supplication and humility crying:—"Lord—Lord! may it succeed!"—

How long he may have stood thus he does not know—

It is a long time since the Staff Officer had stepped back and joined the others. The little map-table looks empty: the two slender barrels of the telescope, screwed to their utmost seeing capacity, point out into space: it has all become so senseless—lacking all object . . . only waiting to be carted away as so much refuse connected with hours from which all meaning has now passed away—been wiped out.

It is very quiet now, up on this little boarded

platform, the dried woodwork of which has shrunk and cracked beneath the pitiless heat of the sun. All the men are silent. Every movement is careful and unobtrusive; but eyes meet eyes, and questioning glances exchanged are full of brooding anxiety. The grey ghost of threatening disaster hangs over all; it touches even the keenest and smartest; the proud, and those with whom victory has hitherto been reckoned as a dead certainty. It fastens, too, on those others in whom there had already been some sense of premonition for days past, and raises questions as to the ultimate consequences of this calamity of which no more than the bare outline is as yet known—

What will happen next?—How is it all to end?—

And the King stands on the parapet like an image carved in stone: wrestling with the unbelievable blow Fate has dealt him; feeling, groping for some path of relief—turning here and there, like some wild animal that in the imprisonment of its cage passes to and fro before the iron bars that enclose it—and thus the hours go by.

XXI

HE staggers through the rest of the day like some sleep-walker, enmeshed in an eerie dream.

Away—away—from here!

And the departure is a flight.

The cars are now careering through the grey dust to Rethel. He arrived at this decision quite suddenly: he must see *someone*—someone with whom he can speak openly and from whom he may hear something. Not those at Avesnes, who have left him alone in this hour. He must see someone to whom he can open his heart about it all—someone who will understand him—

And the thought of such a one now suddenly confronts him in the person of that staunch and ever-faithful old soldier, the Chief of the First Army . . . so—to Rethel.

His coming is an invasion—bringing disquiet and confusion. Then, at the side of this wiry little old General, with the broad-cheeked and wizened, old-womanish face, the King walks up and down the neglected garden at the back of the house . . . up and down—up and down.

Here is relief! . . . His hands move in frequent and feverish gestures, punctuating, as it were, the hurried sentences as these come precipitately across his lips; words teeming with bitterness—full of hopeless anxiety: raising many an accusation, many a reproach—The other listens . . . and is silent.

The weather-worn old features, tanned by wind and sun to a red-brown, remain immovable. Only from time to time do the lips of that shrunken toothless mouth part slightly, as if gasping for breath—and then close again abruptly.

The old General had clasped his hands behind his back, a back bent with many a heavy trouble, and his gait is a trifle uncertain, as he stamps up and down over the weedy paths at the side of his Royal Master. He gives the impression of being by far the older man, worn out as he has been in the duties of his profession, and yet there is no more than five years difference between the two.

The old soldier refrains from responding by as much as a word to this passionate and unrestrained outburst. He knows the King: knows the transparency of his nature—his desires and his aims. He knows, too, his limitations; sees the insufficiency of strength to enable him—of his own initiative—to cope with this reverse: sees the lack of a clear insight—the want of due restraint!—sees the impetuous distrust so openly displayed by what is nevertheless a strong and incorruptible personality—lacking in the power for fulfilment. But, beyond all this he feels: here is a man in trouble! and understands that all this load of congested worry must be jettisoned

before any words of reasoning can reach and penetrate the depths—there possibly to find root. And not until the full torrent of the King's words has been spent does he venture to speak. Then the voice is quiet and even, with at times even a slightly plaintive note.

Soldierly, official in his delivery, and without swerving from his course, nor giving too much heed to the King's interjections, which, while now and again impetuous and enquiring, finally become quieter, and more acquiescent:—

“Certainly: a most dire and grave misfortune: but that such should at times intervene is part and parcel of the fortunes of war—and none—no, not the greatest—not even Old Fritz himself,—have escaped such blows: how often had not *he* had to relinquish an unsuccessful offensive and adopt the defensive line of action?—The thing is not to lose one's nerve, or get shaken out of that calm which is so requisite for all deliberation . . . this is above all the Commander's first duty in this dark hour—and that they have felt this to be so has been shown by both the men at Avesnes, who, as soldiers, are surely the best our generation has produced, and who will most assuredly have taken the present step with no light hearts. Then, too, in view of this stupendous task now weighing on them, every moment becomes trebly charged with responsibility and duties—all borne with self-sacrificing devotion to their Chief War Lord and King! They have not only to take measures for the winding-up of the battle being fought, and which—over its greatest area—is now to resolve itself into a defensive action, but they must take precautions so as to be prepared for all those emergencies which may yet have to be reckoned with, where the separate sectors are concerned. And, furthermore, they are at the same time occupied with those new conceptions, which—despite all these disillusionments—must, nevertheless, be evolved out of the altered situation and now become active.” The General stands still: he has paused, heedless of the blazing sun, and his dark eyes, peer-

ing out from amid a network of wrinkles, seek those of his King. And then the plaintive voice sounding spiritualized, as though he were voicing the ultimate wisdom he has garnered during a life that had reached an early maturity, says:—

“For to *act* is everything! and we are unconquered and unbroken: entitled, as soldiers, to every belief in Victory, as long as we possess the will and the power to act in face of those others—as long as we choose the new field of battle and the day: it would only be if we should lose these two pre-eminent advantages—be it either through the enemy or—through influences brought to bear behind our own Front—that . . .”

The King breaks in excitedly—for here is something that touches those questions which like some festering poison are for ever disturbing his thoughts—yet as to which he cannot bear to hear another speak: for the Unspeakable lurks there—amid gloom and darkness: Internal disruption—Civil war: Upheaval: a feeling of superstitious revulsion comes over him: not a word of it! do not awaken this dread thing!—

And violently, as if in imploring expostulation, he cries:—

“Your Excellency! In your opinion—have we still the power to act? Leadership to guide the course of events—in spite of yesterday . . . and in spite of to-day?”

And the General's eyes meet the flashing blue ones of the King squarely, holding their agonized restlessness by the force of his own calm and quiet, as he says:—

“Yes, Your Majesty—we still have it—we have it so far. . . .”

The King sinks his glance: his eyelids flicker as he stares down on to the riot of weeds about the ill-kept garden path. A beetle, glittering in its sheen of steely blue, is dragging something along—holding its booty between its short pincers . . . dragging the thing along: staggering over the stones—across the grass—creeping beneath the blades—

He watches this—it seems as if he must do so—the while he is standing biting his lips, with his thoughts twisting, turning and groping—now here, now there—restlessly contending with those words “we still have it . . . we have it—so far. . . .”

Then he tears himself free—and all this sinks into oblivion. He throws up his head, and turns impulsively to another question:—

“Your Excellency spoke just now of chances; chances which might possibly still be made good in the case of other sectors—and, in spite of this mishap. . . ?”

“Certainly, Your Majesty.”

“Well, I do not know whether you happen to be already aware, but the Quartermaster-General has reported that the position south of the Marne has also become extremely difficult. . . .”

“That is so, Your Majesty: we have had the same news from the adjacent army. In as far as I am in a position to diagnose the situation from here, the troops will have to be withdrawn across the river, as soon as this can be carried through without incurring too heavy a sacrifice: besides, apart from its bearing on the original scheme, there would be neither sense nor reason in this undertaking south of the Marne, it”

But the King brings his stick down on the path and flames up:—

“That must not be! That would mean—both for the French and for all the others—that we had lost a second battle on the Marne—I It would become a byword—would give them something to take hold of. . . . I”

But the other shrugs his spare shoulders, moving his head in the negative—

“Your Majesty—I can only approach these matters from the purely military point of view, and I am afraid that our military position at the present moment does not warrant our indulging in the luxury of stickling over matters of prestige. I do not know what the Supreme Army Command may think on this point—though they will soon have to make up

their minds—but, in my opinion, we should not seek to retain our hold on the territory south of the Marne: we may be glad if we can keep the portion that we now occupy along the course of the river—”

No more than a deep sigh, accompanied by a despairing shake of the head, escapes the King, as this inconceivably cruel transformation of the situation is presented to him.

“ But—still . . . ”

“ Yes? ” and the King’s eyes fill with a look of impatient, anxious question; surely there is something in the tone in which these two words are spoken that seem to promise a gleam of light in all this darkness—a hint at success, in spite of all failure. . . .

“ What I mean, Your Majesty, is: one thing may still bring us victory:—*perhaps*, and should not entirely unforeseen events knock it out of our hands, and that is—*Rheims!* ”

Rheims!—The King seems petrified at the thought: his eyelids flicker, and in his acute excitement he gives a deep gasp. Rheims! then there actually *is* a ray of hope! and—like some ravenous animal—he now throws himself upon this idea—this “ spar ” amid the wreckage, and clings to the support thus offered him. All his wandering thoughts now gather about this word—this problem—in which may yet lie hope . . . they catch a spark of light and impulses flicker up anew.

“ Then Your Excellency thinks this possible?! ” and he puts the question breathlessly, hardly able to control his voice.

“ I consider it not only possible, but likely, Your Majesty, should time still be left us in which to allow this fruit to ripen. If once we have firm control of the great road from Epernay, the city will no longer be in a position to breathe—”

The King nods emphatically: he is now completely absorbed and enmeshed in the new circle of thought. Of course: Rheims!—If we possess the hill country, as well as the road by which she lives and draws

her food supply, then she must fall! and—after all—she is already within measurable distance of her fate . . . any child can see that! Her resistance hangs by no more than a thread—a slender thread, which is bound to be broken. This would certainly count as a success—as far as outward appearances are concerned, and—besides that—it would inflict a deep wound on the enemy, while at home it would act as a distinct pledge, strengthening their flagging faith. . . .

And his eager, unreined fancy is already busy weaving pictures as to these future possibilities. Prior to the first retreat he had, accompanied by the gentlemen of his suite, driven through this city so stubbornly disputed for now close on four years. He had there held an inspection of his troops, at that time so comfortably quartered in those extensive catacombs, and had attended Divine Service in the ancient Cathedral that had formerly witnessed the crowning of the Kings of France. And he had given orders that no measures should be spared so as to ensure the safety of this glorious old pile—already severely damaged—from further destruction . . . he, whom *those over there* were never tired of slandering as The Barbarian, The King of The Huns—The Bôche! . . .

A feverish restlessness now betrays his inward excitement; it shows in an uncontrollable desire for movement: his volubility can hardly cope with the thoughts that spring up in his mind, and his right hand, raised in eager gesticulation, emphasises the words as they pour forth. He is frantically bearing down the despair that had held sway in his heart, and—encouraged by the sound of his own voice—he now finds a new hold for all the desires and inclinations he has so insistently harboured—sure ground on which they can again unfold.

Of course:—the big Michael concern has floundered, according to its original form: it would be folly to blind oneself to that: No, that fact has to be faced. And it is, after all, because of this that he is now standing here, discussing the whole

situation with the General. Time has, of course, been lost, valuable time—owing to this set-back . . . and still more valuable human lives—but it has not been the fault of the troops—no—!

Yet—a faint touch of hesitation underlies this exclamation of triumphant confidence—and the King guardedly scans the General's countenance. But the latter nods an affirmative, adding, gravely:—

“No: certainly not, Your Majesty; the troops gave whatever there was in them to give. . . .”

“There—you see!” ejaculates the King: and his voice flows on:—And this is why he is further convinced that the present trouble will be surmounted in the same way as others have been in the course of these past weary years of strain. There will be other and fresh attacks and—so God will!—with better success! and after all is said and done, *Rheims remains*: Rheims—that can scarcely now elude us!

A military position of the very greatest value! a Pillar and pivot for the entire Front . . . and for this very reason—and quite apart from any military loss—bound to act on *those over there* as a sort of moral damper; a check, likely to produce strong and far-reaching effects.

Increased excitement has brought about a sort of mental intoxication which keeps the King on the go for the remainder of the hour that he spends with the General and his Staff. Not till he is alone again, and freed from the restraint of other eyes, alone in his car, the Standard with the Eagle fluttering before him, and rushing through the dull, overcast country, does all this state of exaltation fall again, sinking to nothingness. Mere painted scenery, set up for himself and others; in which he cannot even truly believe. . . .

And now nothing save grey care at his heart and in his brain—it seems to feed on him—

Everything around is indistinct. . . .

Thick red-brown swathes—and masses of up-churned loam and the ridges of sun-dried chalk, now pulverized and friable as dust, hangs a heavy

veil over the distance, while the immediate neighbourhood is choked with stifling dirt.

Behind the King sit his two adjutants: the Count and the Guardsman . . . and no sound breaks the silence during that drive of many hours.

XXII

THE evening at Bosmont is one of continuous worry.

The outward conventions to be maintained are sharply defined: these are matters of tradition—and the thing is to get through it all with a conformable appearance of dignity; yet Banquo's ghost might well have been sitting at table in their midst.

The Chamberlain's lively eyes seem to compel an assumption of cheerfulness and gaiety, but the Secretary of Legation's discreet attempts, and the Prince's amazing indiscretions meet with a frigid reception—their witticisms fall flat, as though both these gentlemen were non-existent, the King doing no more than exchange a few words from time to time with his friend, the Civil Chief.

The whole thing tends to become unbearable, and as soon as the meal is at an end he rises, salutes those present, beckons to the Staff Captain and goes to his own compartment.

"The evening reports. . . ."
and the officer starts reading:—

"No—only those from the battle-front. . . ."

A rustling and turning over of papers, and then the voice begins again:

"The movements for attack on the part of the Third Army, as also where the left wing of the First Army was concerned, have been cancelled. On the south of the Marne we have, during the course of the day, been more and more compelled to assume

the defensive—the enemy having in those parts brought up fresh and powerful forces to throw against us. Yet, on either side of the river and in close proximity to it, we are still gaining ground—along towards Epernay. We are now about ten kilometres from the town, so that the circle around Rheims has again narrowed.”

The King hears the words without comment: it would almost seem as if he had scarcely noticed them, and his eyes are vacantly fixed on space.

The Staff Captain waits, expectantly—then says hesitatingly:—“Your Majesty, I have also spoken to the Quartermaster-General across the 'phone as to the situation on the Marne, and he ordered me to acquaint Your Majesty with the fact that the bridges are under heavy enemy fire, also being attacked by squads of bomb-throwers: the reinforcements are in a position of great difficulty, the communications being threatened: there is some danger of their being cut off—it will therefore be necessary to . . .”

But the King arrests any further words by a slight gesture: bitterly and without moving his eyes from the distance, he concludes the sentence:—“ . . . ‘draw our forces back across the river again’—eh?! ‘into the potato-patch . . . out of the potato-patch’! and the whole thing goes by the name of History . . . is that not so?!”

There is no answer.

“Any more pleasant happenings?”

“I asked the General what he thought of suggesting to Your Majesty for to-morrow, and he asked whether Your Majesty would not be inclined to watch the fight going on at Rheims from the area just north-east of that city.”

The King nods, seemingly without much interest, saying in dull tones: “Very well, then . . . you can see that that is arranged.”

Silence: a clink of heels and spurs—then steps, which become gradually more remote—

Then—for a moment, it seems to the King as if he must free himself from this burden . . . call him

back—ask him something . . . anything—if only to have him standing near—

But he only sits motionless, and listens to the retreating steps:—Alone—

He closes his eyes and leans his head back: time passes—the little clock on the table is ticking—ticking very quietly.

He feels so dead-tired: a dreamy stupor has come upon him—so like a condition of fever—

Shall he send for the Professor? But he dismisses the thought almost before it is actually formulated: whatever can the Medical Officer do for him? give him a sleeping-draught? he is not disposed to take what would really be sufficient . . . and, as for gentle and kindly advice:—“*Rest . . . no excitement!*” . . .

And now he is seeing pictures of the days just past: they follow each other at random, coming into line without any definite connection, one with the other—just floating past him:—

There is the dead rat he saw at the foot of the tower when about to ascend yesterday: a rat . . . dead as a door-nail—and for a moment his mind toys with the words, then drops them again. It must have been killed by someone while in full flight and it was looking so curiously flat—had the appearance of having been pressed flat, as are specimens of plants, when dried for preservation. There had been drops of dried blood about its little ears—and the lips of the thin snout had receded, exposing the protruding teeth, giving it a look of arrogant annoyance—and an evil, determined grin.

And then, there had been the greased boots of the General's at Rethel—slit and cracked . . . and he wondered whether they might not date from the days of that officer's first manœuvres—when he was still a lieutenant! With the full blaze of the sun catching and reflected on their bumps and excrescences, they too, had seemed like a couple of old Generals, stamping along—over gravel, grass and lettuces! And then there had been the officers of the General's Staff: he had stood among them and

had talked of Rheims—and of the weather: bad weather for fighting . . . *that* needed improvement, too! And none of them had made as much as a sound. Only the old Colonel-General, who had “built himself up” on their flank, had kept on nodding—perpetually nodding—just like some eager witness for the Crown: glaring at the rest with his sharp, bloodshot old eyes, as much as to say:—“That’s so!—What His Majesty says *is so*, you know!”

Then the King dismisses these pictures with a start. He looks about him, as though hoping to find some relief from all this thralldom of wild phantasmagoria . . . but no: here is only what he has been over thousands of times already—state papers and other documents . . . and further—the small table, with its load of books and pamphlets, spread out in fan-shaped order—and, upon a low stand, a flat leather case.

His eyes rest on this for a moment, and are quickly averted with feelings of bitterness: for within that case, carefully resting on its velvet lining, lies his Field-Marshal Staff: And then the thought comes upon him:—

“All—all that may now be going to happen . . . be it due to failure or misfortune, will, nevertheless, be thrown on my shoulders by future generations—even as they are now trying to foist the responsibility for the present war upon me—!”

He pushes back his chair with quick impetuosity—clenching the two arms with his hands—and once again the full force of this accusation fastens its remorseless fangs upon him . . . *he*, the instigator of the war—! *He!*—and he feels as though he could hardly support the unheard-of injustice of it all . . . of the taunt flung at him again and again—day after day! It grins at him from the lines of every foreign newspaper, like some venomous toad that he is being made to swallow! This lie, begotten of English hypocrisy and French infamy, and that has tortured and martyred him for years—in

face of which he is powerless, yet against which he rebels with all the strength that is in him, with every argument of intelligence, and which, nevertheless, is indestructible, each of its serpent-heads—when struck off—giving birth to two more, that follow and pursue him . . . and that may yet drive him to . . . drive him to . . .

Then suddenly a recollection arises which seems dimly connected with this torture—and it leads him back to explore the past and listen to some inner voice . . . what was it?

He sees a flat face, with glassy, staring eyes—the face of a despot: pale, and with an arrogance verging on contempt. The eyes are a greyish-green, hard and without the least gleam of light; a self-willed brow—and above it a shock of upstanding hair: Franz Ferdinand!—Yes: it was some tale that he had told him—was it at Eckartay? Oh, no! it must have been at Konopischt!

They had been talking about the Haradschin at Prague, and the Archduke had been telling him about the horrors of the subterranean alcoves in the Daliborka, places of torture devised by the devilish ingenuity of fanatical brutes. And it seems now as if the quiet, ingratiating voice were at his side and talking to him again with all its inflections of refined cruelty: telling him how that there, in the darkness into which no light ever penetrated, the condemned were bound to a walled-in chair in one of these subterranean cells, where they were incapable of movement, and that then from above, through a hole in the ceiling, and descending from two floors higher, a drop of water would fall upon the prisoner . . . just one drop—no more—of ice-cold water, hitting him on the crown of the head—exactly on the bare parting . . . one drop: that was all!—shake it off? it was impossible! and every three minutes came another drop . . . and splashed down on to the same spot—day and night; day and night! Sleep? Rest? in vain! They had but to wait two or three minutes, racked with terror and

fear, and then would come that ice-cold little blow again . . . and so it would go on—until the man down there had finally been driven insane. It is said that no one ever bore this martyrdom for longer than three days and three nights.

The King stares out in front of him: all the connecting threads which had led up to this recollection have vanished; only the face of the man who had told him that story remains: that face, in which races and civilizations of all times, along with their ultimate and secretive instincts and passions, fears and delusions, all seemed to conjoin and form a mask.

His thoughts next turn to the secret crimes and horrors perpetrated in those century-old, weather-worn palaces of Ferrara, Modena and Reggio: he sees the murder, rape, incest; the bastardy and poisonings: and with it—side by side—the astute statemanship: lavish patronage, coupled with the highest intellectual culture, and—crowning it all—the blood-thirsty fanaticism of the Austro-Spanish Inquisitors: Cruelty and Deceit, perpetrated in God's Honour: Greed of Power: the Wisdom of the Serpent—and inflexible Power of Will . . . all these, moreover, brought together in that Heir to one single idea:—

"Through me shall a new and more powerful Austria arise!"

And the King reflects:—

"If only he were now at Vienna—and standing by my side in this matter, rather than this wretched shabby little liar—this protégé of the Jesuits, whom the fear of Rome has unmanned!"

Then moving his head he murmurs:

"Dead . . . murdered . . .!"

And he seems to see the wide scarlet gash—the trickling blood upon the pavement in front of the Town Hall at Sarajevo—and sees arising from that blood all the cramped, constraining iniquities committed by the victim's forgotten ancestors, rising and taking wing—circling hither and thither—as if preparing for some debauch of unexampled venge-

ance on the dead . . . setting the world aflame and spreading horror. . . .

He starts up from his chair: listlessly, and with uncertain steps, he paces a few times up and down the narrow compartment.

The air is close—almost to suffocation. He lets down the window-sash, so that the drawn curtains flutter in the wind, and loosens the collar of his regimental coat. His thoughts are pursuing the same vicious circle: matters worried over—seized upon and dismissed again a hundred times before now, recur to him anew:—

“And—is all that I have been doing for these past thirty years—is all this to be wiped out?—Is it to count for nothing?! Just because success has once miscarried? What was Germany when I came to the throne? and what has it not become during these thirty years of my reign?! Was it not I who awakened her from her sleep—rousing her from that spirit of easy contentment at laurels won in bygone wars: stirred her from that habit of standing aside, compelling her along my path to peaceful, yet undreamed-of power? Pursuing my way, too, in the face of all opposition: and in spite of the hatred of both the timid and the insubordinate: of the grumblers and the effete? Did I not found her colonies? Create her Navy? Has not the Army become what it is through me? And—as to technical matters, industry, science and trade? has not their advance, too, been almost incredible? And—shall these things not remain? In whatever way we may come out of this war—are not these things witnesses for me, above and beyond all the pitiable noise made by those who slander, backbite and abuse me?”—

And then one single thought becomes detached from the whirl and obtrudes itself on his mind:—“the opposition of the timid and the insubordinate—the grumblers and the effete” . . . And—he halts in his restless passing to and fro.

One figure now seems to stand out from a dim and indistinguishable host: that of the Giant, whose

unforgiving grudge, rising from the grave, still throws its shadow across his life—The First Chancellor.

And he thinks:—"What does this mean? How did I come upon him?" Then dimly groping he finds the clues—the connecting threads—leading from those bygone years to the present hour. Words that were dropped then have gained their significance now: words which he then spoke in warning and which are now approaching their fulfilment.

He looks about him as if in search of relief . . . the light from the lamps on the walls strikes his eyes almost painfully—as if they were touching some wounded spot, and—stepping aside—he turns them off, leaving no more than a glow from ceiling and table-lamp in the apartment. Then he sinks down into the broad armchair again.

The First Chancellor.—

He looks back into the past—away over years and decades.

No: even then—at that time—none of them had understood how he came to be driven into that struggle. For, prompted by feelings of veneration, and for reasons of pride, he had maintained silence then; had never spoken of that within which had lain the roots of the rupture—he had preferred to bear the onus of being the one who was to blame; the onus of having dismissed that other one in the vanity of self-sufficiency and in rank ingratitude. Rather that, than lay bare the particulars of the conflict before the eyes of the multitude. Then his thoughts revert once more to his father, to the Crown Prince, who, while sick unto death, had yet yearned for the throne, and who looked with so much ill-will on his eager active son; placing obstacles in his way—contriving—from the very beginning—to render him "impossible" in the eyes of the man he so deeply revered, and who was—in days to come—to be his principal Adviser and Aid.

And the King, staring into the deepening dusk,

lets the bitterness of those long-gone years well up and flood his mind:—

“ I was still Prince William at that time: it was about eighteen months before my grandfather's death—and *then—then* already—he started abusing me to the old man: wrote him that letter in which he censured me—the future Crown Prince and King—as though I had been some stupid boy! ”—

And the words of that letter, burnt in, as they are, on his memory, are as fresh in his mind to-day:—

“ He is immature—has a tendency to exaggerate, as also to over-estimation: a quick judgment, which is the result of undue hastiness. It would be absolutely dangerous to attempt to enter into questions touching Foreign Affairs with him.”—

“ And all this only because I had endeavoured to get employment at the Foreign Office, and without he—my father—having as much as said a word to me on the subject first! and while, at the same time, my grandfather had raised no objection! ”

The King bites his lip, till the pressure of his teeth arouse a sense of pain. How well he remembers having been apprised of the contents of that letter, and he had—for very helpless shame—howled like some tethered animal that is being lashed with a whip! *He*—a man of seven-and-twenty, and the Colonel and Commanding Officer of his Potsdam Guards: the future heir to the throne. . . .

He had felt bereft of honour—held up to ridicule before the one man whom—beside his grandfather, he had—from childhood up—most admired and respected; with whom the desire to stand well had, in no undue spirit of humility, been his most ardent wish!

He knows now that that was how it all began!

“ My father undermined the very ground upon which I was in later life to stand. All that was best in me—my dignity, my self-confidence, was shaken where my dealings with the Giant were concerned, who—and had he ten times transcended me—should

yet have regarded me with honour and respect . . . me, his King! But his hatred placed the stamp of mediocrity upon me—'unreliable and overbearing!' . . . 'to be dealt with cautiously!' He poisoned all belief in me, plied him with prejudices—and that before I was in a position to show what I wanted—what I was after! "

The King sits on—oblivious of time and surroundings: all thought absorbed and held captive by this vision of the past. *That* had been the beginning—and so it had gone on.

He had become conscious—senses ever more and more—that he was thought little of . . . not taken at his full value: distrust had dogged his every step—questioned every word he uttered. At the back of each one's brain had been the thought: "Enough—enough! we know very well that you are given to exaggeration—that you are immature . . ." till the first question to arise in his mind would be: "Have they slandered and blackened me to you too?" And then—to be young! possessing an innate as well as an acquired sense of dignity, neither of which a man cares to have scraped from his body—so to speak! Until obstinacy at length asserts itself and cries: "Very well, then!—if they don't want me, I can find my own circle—but a day will come—later on—when I shall show you what I am made of!"—And the Following thus found . . . well, no, it may perhaps not have been the best: it was a *Fronde*—made up of those who speculate on the future, "planking their money" on the "Man-to-Come": a set of either Irresponsibles—or Enthusiasts.

Yet was such knowledge only acquired later on, when time had gone by—and experience been gained. And thus had he built his own surroundings, which had lacked connection with any other. And the seething thoughts that arise in a man's mind are voiced in such a circle: whate'er may fill the mind—be it touching Religion or Social matters, or questions of National Import—the Country's welfare and position:—It may not all be purest gold

or the profoundest wisdom—indeed, how should it be? training and experience are lacking . . . and *he*, it might almost be said, had been forcibly held back from acquiring either! yet—what a relief it had been to get away from that perpetual field-duty and turning up at parades!

The Prospects?—Well, the History of his own House had set an ideal over which he had ever enthused in his youthful days—an Ideal that in later days too had maintained its hold upon his imagination; been his Guiding Star, as it were, One as to whom he has said to himself:—"What you were—that will I become!" . . . An ancestor who, indeed, had fared no better. One whom *his* father had slandered too, wherever he had been able—in the *Tabagie*—to the officers—to everyone: labelling him an "effete fellow"! a "baboon"! going so far even as to strike him when at the Hessian Camp at Radewitz—and, doing so in his mad hatred before strangers! *The young Fritz!* Young Fritz, who was later to become *Fredericus Rex!*

And then he calls to mind the first differences of opinion he had had with the Giant: it had been in November and December of 1887, and more in the nature of a "scrap" between outposts . . . nothing that had become public.

This first friction had concerned a confidential document, drafted in case of a change of Sovereigns, and more particularly touching Stöcker and the Christian-Socialist agitation. Ideas had been aired in his circle which had the aim of regaining for the weal of the Fatherland the confidence of the masses then embracing Socialism, by advancing interests of a more Christian nature for their consideration. These ideas were taken objection to as being "political." Feeling became roused against him and he then broke the silence by writing a personal letter of explanation to the Chancellor: a letter that was like to an outstretched hand, ready to grasp the other's: heartfelt and almost passionate in its utterances—in its confession of attachment and admiration.

Yet—for a long time there had been no reply. Then—all was pushed aside . . . was he right—or was he wrong? But no: it had been the *tone* in which the whole matter had been conducted.

Warm-hearted endeavour had been met by an attitude of cold defence: and the old man's letter, when it came, had teemed with frigid and experienced wisdom. Its direct effect on the younger man, hungering for a warm word of encouragement and recognition, was that of a rebuff: a sermon, replete with warnings and admonitions—the garnered store of superior knowledge shed down on him from those lofty heights: and so it had ended! Was there any attempt at conciliating the culprit? No—indeed! “Soldiers alone can deal with Democrats!” and “who of his circle but nurses some private hope and desire?” “who do you think serves you for love—or for the sake of the work at stake?” “what are you to them but the future King—all of it but the mere means to further themselves—no more!”

And so the letter had touched wounds and susceptibilities, rather than serving to build a bridge.

There had perhaps been some moments which might have been decisive in determining much that was connected with future events, but—somehow or other—the possibility of really seeing eye to eye had gradually ceased—and beneath all the conventional form of externals, there had been the tiny rift.

By that time the King had been nine-and-twenty: Young Fritz was eight-and-twenty at the time he had been summoned from Potsdam to his father's death-bed—to take over the Government.

And for him too had the moment then come when he might have been able to show this man what he was made of; this man he had at one time so humbly sought to win—without whom he had felt that he could hardly “find himself.” “It shall yet come to pass,” he had then thought, “that I shall win my due—that he shall court me . . . and such a recognition would indeed suffice for me to waive all

else, and go with him—even as did my grandfather . . . and with such thoughts in his mind had he entered on that new life . . . taken up the new work.

The King draws a deep breath.

What a lifetime lies between then and now, and yet—it seems as though it had all happened but a few weeks ago.

And further pictures serve to bring this past afresh before his mind: all that full flood of desires, hopes and wishes then possessing him recur in this present moment—they throb in his blood like some feverish dream.

He rises, and strides up and down again—restless and overwrought, despite all physical weariness and exhaustion.

Those times that had been so full of joyous and creative energy! Hindrances and chains had fallen from him—life had taken on a new aspect: undreamed of strength seemed his . . . but where to begin? What needed doing first? And there had been so much he had yearned to do!

Everything had been new—the immeasurable confronted him! Responsibility for the happiness and the welfare of a People! And yet—he was without knowledge—for in their jealousy, fear and distrust, they had deprived him of the power of gaining all insight. Help, study, enquiries regarding a thousand matters then became imperative . . . but how could he—in his plight—possibly approach this man who held all the threads in his hands? Since, firstly: he did not exactly want to give himself away, and—secondly—because it seemed more feasible to get at things indirectly—in conversation with the Ministers and Secretaries of State. And then too, the Chancellor had a way of ignoring or pooh-poohing whatever others might wish to do, this being also his attitude towards new questions, suggestions and ideas. It was, in fact, not altogether “plain sailing” for anyone who had not been, as it were, “trained and approved” by the Old Man—and who inclined to swear by him:

others were, as often as not, set down as mere "flatterers"; "adventurers"; "intriguers"; or—"amateur politicians."

But then again, if he turned to one of the Chancellor's "Aids," who were, indeed, ever most willing to oblige and often surprisingly ready to enter into any new suggestion, the Chief was sure to be aggrieved and scented "apostasy"—and a tendency to the forming of "cliques"! Resented it, in fact, in that cast-iron way of his and would allow the weight of his displeasure to press on his subordinates—to the end that it made matters intolerable for them.

For a long time he had gone on hoping that this state of things might be but a passing phase, and that he would gradually adapt himself to the new situation. Yet there was no improvement—indeed, it soon became evident that here was petrifying age in stiff-necked opposition to everything that might be new.

Restrictions on every side: every step forward being hindered at some point or other by considerations as to what *he* might say or think! He—he—and again and again—he!

Of course, no one wished to oust the Old Man, but—after all . . . he was not a mere "super"!

Surely he was the King—placed there by the Grace of God to reign—to act! moreover, that very Grace had placed him under an obligation—it called on him to fulfil the duties of the position he occupied to the best of his powers and abilities!

There was no valid reason why he should be the perpetual lay-figure! Then, too, was he not continually being made aware that the number of those whom the whole matter intrigued was increasing day by day? And thus, in the course of time, there came to be two camps—two parties.

The King halts before the window; pushes the curtain aside to admit the night air and looks out into the darkness that now lies over the neglected old orchard. Those trees that have long ceased to bear, stand out black against the gloom; their net-

work of dry and slender twigs giving them a "bearded" appearance. All is still: only the water in the brook gurgles on, and on the air trembles that distant roll . . . that constant dull roll—

The King tries his utmost to escape these thoughts of the past: to ease this nervous tension—and find rest. He asks himself:—

"Why ever should all this have come upon me now? . . . and here? at this hour—with our existence or—non-existence—hanging in the balance?! It is all past and gone—and belongs to a different period—"

But in a few moments he is again under the sway of some invisible power—enmeshed at work in those hidden depths and—groping, feeling—seeking—

"His fault? After all . . . what may be fault—and what may not be fate?! The ground had been poisoned—and there lay the reason for no getting away from that old bitterness, to the end that some better understanding might have been arrived at. While, in addition to this fundamental distrust and misunderstanding, had come opposing opinions—. At the close of the first year of his reign, the Tsar had come to Berlin, and later, the suggestion was made that he might as well return the visit. But the Old Man was opposed to such a course, and at the back of his demur the ill-concealed thought was plainly evident which amounted to this:—

"You just stay where you are, my boy; who knows what you may not be up to, if you go off on our own, for without any controlling hand you'll be making a mess of things!"—A nice sort of "vote of confidence"! yet was this the sort of estimation he had become used to since he had been blackened on every side—and the "balance struck" at the close of that first year of his reign reveals him in a state of impotence—nevertheless, he was silent: after all, there was no such particular hurry about that return visit!

And then, he had been taking particular interest in the question of the Working Classes. The idea

had been the old one, conceived when he still was prince, and embodied some plan whereby the Monarchy might succeed in gaining the confidence of the estranged masses, placing before them newer and broader possibilities of solution.

It had ever been his heart's desire to assist all youthful ambition; he conceived it to be his duty so to do—that he had been chosen for this work. And so he had worked at the idea, framing laws for the protection of the Worker, and—hopeful of thus giving an impetus towards broadening the basis of the Social State. In this he had approached the Old Man, desirous of his help and co-operation. . . . But it was of no good. At the bare mention of such a scheme his eyes and the lines about his mouth became eloquent of disapproval: What?—strengthen the power of the throne by co-operating with the Working Classes?! Meet them half-way?!—An experiment without the faintest chance of success!—It would mean—in so many words—humbly capitulating to them! Ceding the ground of one's own accord! And the lust for advantages thus raised would grow until it became uncontrollable! He had uttered his comments, too, in that slightly ironical tone he was wont to assume when information received from others was quoted to him: with reference to one who happened to be an artist he always used the sobriquet of “Raphael,” and dubbed everything with regard to which the King was passionately in earnest as a “cadging for popularity—from below.”

The particulars regarding such attacks had generally been retailed to him “piping-hot,” so to speak, by some obliging individual and it was a matter for his own concern to afterwards “figure out” how all this was to square with his dignity as King!

Then came a time when there seemed no further possibility of working together—

The King is still staring out into the gloom of the quiet garden. A clock is striking somewhere: the sounds reach him slowly and ponderously—as if

they were swimming through the dark: stroke upon stroke—eleven o'clock.

A strange and sudden impulse comes over him to go out into the night: to rid himself—out in space—of all these worries and heart-searchings: to wash it all away, as in a cleansing bath . . . only for once to be free of all this misery!

But he remains where he is and there is an expression of conviction in his eyes which seems to say—*there can be no such relief for you.*

The memory of a night in the Spring of the year now past comes back to his mind. The train was then standing at Trélon, and he had on waking, risen, and gone to the window of his sleeping compartment. It may have been about three in the morning, and the meadow—planted with saplings,—which adjoined the neighbouring country house, had looked almost black, while above there had been no more than a faint glimmer of moon and stars. There had been a pungent smell in the air, telling of the earth's new life; then—in the distance, a couple of sentries and a machine-gun, to deal with aerial attacks.

And he had seen the figure of a man, bare-headed, with no more than his cloak about his shoulders, walking up and down—up and down, on the edge of that gloomy meadow. It had been the old Lieutenant-General, the predecessor of the present rotund Chief of the Military Cabinet—and the old officer had lost his last son—the second one to fall . . . only four girls left. He had hardly said a word about it the day before, when the wire came; had just gone on with his work—and then, when it was night he could bear his confined space no longer, and so had marched up and down—up and down in an endeavour to cast aside his load of sorrow. And the King thinks:—

“And I—? If I were to get up and go outside in search of rest—! they would take me to be mad! the General and the Chamberlain would be after me—and the Doctor beside himself!” The whole constraint, narrowness, lack of freedom encompassing his life is weighing on him to an extent he

can hardly bear. He draws the curtain again and turns hastily away. Then, standing by his writing-table he thinks vaguely—"What was it—? What-ever was it. . . ?"

There had come a day when the measure was full and running over . . . and the pictures and memories are at him again—crowding about him—tearing at him—loath to let go their hold!

It was on a morning in March—Great God!—he remembers it as though it had been yesterday! A cold, dull and comfortless day, and it had been to the Foreign Office—to the Official Residence of his son, that he had gone to call on him.

Before two minutes of conversation were over they had been up against each other—the Prince, as usual, maintaining his stark and immovable spirit of opposition. He had indeed felt about fed up—yet he had determined to keep his self-control, for this was the Old Man's "way"—the Great Man had to be borne with: very well, then, in God's Name—very well . . . as long as the thing can really be put up with!

But then the Old Man—holding the trump hand—had brought the conversation round to the Russian visit, that had been arranged to take place that summer, and again attempted to dissuade. To gain his end he then put forward—with seeming unwillingness—and "under the pressure of circumstances"—some report emanating from London—a report in which the Ambassador hands on information received from one of his confidential agents at St. Petersburg to the effect that the Tsar had alluded to the forthcoming visit with coldness and distaste, purporting indeed, to give the very words, which were spiteful and insulting. And here he had felt doubly wounded, for he had believed the relation obtaining to be of the best—and had in fact observed as much to the Prince on more than one occasion. And now, when reviewing the scene across the interval of almost a generation, a red wave seems to arise—he can see himself again with that sheet of paper in his hands on which are

innuendoes, abuse, indignities, such as had never been levelled at him since that unforgettable letter of his father's. And once more—here is the Prince made privy to these insults . . . the man whose esteem of his royal worth he was trying so hard to secure.

The Prince, who had at the moment been standing before him, with an exaggerated expression of frigid regret on his face, and who might have spared him this humiliation and indignity!—might he, perhaps, not rather have led up to it as a means of putting an end to the journey to Krasnoe?

"The Prince had seemed to consider Russian Politics to be a special 'preserve' of his and his son's: ground to be invaded by no other—not even by me—his King! No—no! this could not have gone on!" And the King continued his feverish reminiscences:—

"Then—after that scene—what a conflict I had with myself! I had never confused the Bearer with the Originator of the message, thinking that possibly the Prince might really have held it his duty to initiate me as to how matters stood, so I took myself together—for it seemed better not to be led astray by this indignity—to keep a cool and level head: it had seemed, of course, impossible that he could have maintained complete silence, and when I at length left him; I showed him—after a hard struggle for self-mastery—showed eloquently—that in this matter too, he had my entire confidence and that I would continue to trust him—try to go hand in hand with him. . . . Only one promise did I at that time try to extract from him—doing so as his Sovereign and King—and only for the sake of saving my own face: it concerned formal matters, such as discourses and information received and—well, he refused. He entrenched himself obstinately behind some old statute, and—sure of his victory—dictated to me. . . . I was to capitulate before him—!

After that nothing more was possible—that was the end—!

The King halts and leans across the back of the

chair—grips it tightly with both hands. His eyes look out into the void—one phrase echoing again and again through his exhausted mind:—

“ *And that was the end—!* ”

He stands there immovable—not an eyelid flickers:— he listens—as if something should follow . . . as if the final causes that have dragged him unremittingly through this whirlpool of a bitter past should now reveal themselves and be laid bare—

Why—why? How—to-day—and . . . here?

And then one thought rises slowly before him from the depths—like some dark bubble—rises—bursts—and is gone—!

Three days later, on the same day on which he had sent in his resignation, he had renewed some treaty with Count Schuvalov . . . something touching the extension of a treaty of mutual assurance between Germany and Russia:— “ But, after his time no other Minister renewed that treaty: we took up a different line of policy—and there was a grouping of the Powers.” Yet— amid this gigantic structure of compacts, consolidations, and assurances there had been one stone lacking . . . there had been a rift which in time became a chasm. Perhaps all might have been different had that assurance been maintained—kept intact, instead of which its absence was to pave the way for the treaty between France and Russia—

And one more picture detaches itself and looms before the King:—He sees the Chancellor—wherever it may be—at interviews, conferences, meetings—ever intent on reminding and warning him to this effect:—“ All I have brought into being in the matter of power at the back of this Royal State will become undermined and weakened by every step that may be taken towards meeting the Workers in their Socialistic demands. *Principiis obsta!* The Kingdom should never compromise and be made to appear weak: should this be done, its present path of ascent will turn to a decline—going down the hill. The line between mine and thine must be rigorously kept: the Kingdom should

present an implacable Will and Power in this respect, not permitting itself to be weakened, would it bring its force to bear on the masses. A kingdom should fight for its own rights, doing so calmly and with no uncertain hand and it should fight from the steps of the Throne—.”

And all this had been said with reference to demands that had practically seemed of no account when compared with those about which the masses are now closing their ranks in opposition to the Throne—but then, there have been compromises and concessions, and—step for step—the ancient kingly Power, as he had known and sought to uphold it, has been lost.

And the King's thoughts now revert to the homeland, whence come those tidings of acute and ever-increasing revolutionary trouble: strikes, unrest, and threatened upheavals: tidings which reach the Front, where all is now depending upon the men's strenuous and loyal support. With dark forebodings he sees how increasingly reluctant day by day become the steps of each newly called-up man—aye, it is the same with all returning after their leave has expired—and, at every failure an additional drop of poison is added to the secret conspiracy against him, undermining that loyalty, without which all is lost. . . .

A secret conspiracy—for that is what it is, in spite of all those reassuring words put forward by the authorities. He can sense it: see it in the gaunt and hungry faces—all part and parcel of the cause—: can see it more and more.

And so the masses are prying and groping greedily about the steps of the Throne and lusting for its power—

He passes his hand over his forehead. . . . Then—and to-day?—What is past—and what is present?—

Then the roots seem gradually to be laid bare . . . he can see the stem—and the leaves . . . he stands there staring into the dusk. . . .

There is a slight and cautious tap on the door:—

he starts and glances at the little clock—it is midnight.

“ Yes, yes—Schulz, I am coming directly! ” then he places both hands over his face . . . away—to find rest . . . to get release from all this hopeless and interminable load—to sleep—sleep?

A strong and overpowering desire for the relief and oblivion sleep grants is upon him: he could pray and supplicate for rest—!

He would go across—yet remains standing here—irresolute—Fears arise in his mind—a chasm seems to yawn between him and the door leading into his sleeping compartment.

“ Nerves! ” he thinks. “ Nerves: and surely that’s not to be wondered at! Nerves! ”

And still he hesitates and stands there with his outspread fingers pressed to his brow.

Old Schulz!—then he pulls himself together and words—a fragment of verse—come to his memory amid all this worry and care. . . .

“ To sleep, perchance to dream!—aye—there’s the rub; for in that sleep what dreams may come. . . . ”

Hamlet! ? why? Oh—of course! because of that pretentious, dandified *Landwehr* officer at the tower to-day! but—*was* it to-day? It all seems so long ago—

Then he straightens himself up again—goes to the door—throws it open. . . .

XXIII

THERE is a sultriness lying over the new day: agony in the weight of all that has been experienced and fear and care in the anticipation of every fresh hour.

The fighting south of the Marne that night—up against the new forces that had been brought forward—has proved almost unbearably severe, and so what now remains is being used to stiffen these decimated and broken divisions whose extended line hardly enables them to keep sufficiently in touch to be aware of the extent of their own available strength. At many points no more than a couple of hundred men are in the field, but they hold on—giving the enemy tough work to do.

Where is the line? Even the Staffs are in the dark as to that: hardly any reports are to be had . . . maybe some flying-man will come in with news—The bridges in the rear of those in front have been shattered by a sustained bomb-attack on the part of the enemy; a large percentage of the Reserves sent up have been put out of action and lie crushed and maimed about the roads which are now being raked with fire. And so the order issued by the Supreme Command is that all preparations are to be made in anticipation of breaking up and clearing out. . . .

The Colonel-General takes the Staff Captain aside—just as the latter is going to the King with his Report, and gives him a sharp questioning look to which the Staff Captain responds with a shrug of the shoulders and a short official:—

“No: things are not well . . . all is going badly.”

“Well, then, my dear boy, make the best you can of it to His Majesty. He was awake nearly all last night, and we have to keep him in health. It might be as well not to *particularize* matters to too great an extent: a good deal can be left out, eh? Besides,

things may be better by noon—and then there will have been no earthly reason for all this excitement! ”

The King looks ashen with fatigue when he joins his suite, shaking hands with each, as is his daily wont. There are rings about his eyes and the wave of hair across his forehead has a silvery glint. The thin and tortured-looking face seems, as he greets each one, to be trying hard to assume a kindly expression . . . to find a few words of personal interest he might utter: he is anxious that none shall have cause to feel himself neglected in these times,—nor shall anyone be permitted to see all he is suffering—

Yet the will is greater than the strength to accomplish, and no outward attempt at animation can cloak his gnawing anxiety.

He acquaints them with some of the items from the Reports:—

“ Matters are progressing near Rheims: slower, it is true, and with some trouble, still we are getting on—both in the hill-country and about the Ilse-group.” And after a hasty breakfast, partaken of with but little appetite, the party enter the cars.

To-day the direction taken is southward, their destination being the right wing of the First Army. On they go: past Sissonne: Amifontaine; Berry-aubac, and so into the territory where lies Rheims.

Brimont—St. Thierry—and then in small groups onward on foot, for here the country is exposed to enemy observation.

Here, at all events, one is nearer what is going forward, and not far behind the lines!

Depression still hangs about the King and his companions. The few words uttered seem to have no real connection, and are out of mind almost as soon as spoken. Steps are hesitating and eyes move restlessly, as though some unseen power were impelling them forward—flourishing the lash—

The skies are heavy and overcast. Hidden threats seem to lurk behind this grey dullness: storms

appear to be gathering force behind these walls of vapour, only waiting to break forth.

None knows what may happen—yet each one senses the dull oppressive opposition now relentlessly massing.

A place of observation is selected on the side of a hill and under shelter of a skirting wood. Not long since this spot had been held by the French, and there had been fighting here. Blood-stained bandages, shreds of uniform—discarded odds and ends of outfit lie strewn about amongst the under-wood, and here are hordes of big blue-bottle flies, their wings glittering metallically, as they circle and buzz about over the spots of congealed blood and nameless filth.

The table has been set for the map and the telescope erected on its tripod: a couple of chairs are also forthcoming.

From here Rheims can be seen quite distinctly. The houses and the barracks can be distinguished—and even the pointed arches, roses and carved heads about the battered edifice of the Cathedral can be to some extent recognized. Then—to the left, about the western fringe of the city, lies the scene of the fight now being waged, the struggle for Courcelles, St. Price and Tinguieux.

The Two Hundred and Thirtieth is attacking—Ruins; mine-fields; clouds of smoke—and the dense vapours following on concussion: shooting and hammering . . . and in between—the storm of an assault: tiny manikins—rising out of trenches; pouring over the debris of walls—just a few running forward and then disappearing again . . . sucked up and engulfed by the earth.

And for hours they stand watching this—apparently interested. Yet all this “seeming to be engrossed” is no more than make-believe, and behind it lurks the unrest, the agony and impatience it is so difficult to conceal . . . while all the confusion about the seat of action—amid swathes of smoke and clouds of dirt—convey, after all, but very little to the onlookers.

It is raining spasmodically: great heavy drops—only a few at a time . . . as though the overplus from somewhere else, and soon ceasing, leaving all dull, grey and leaden as before; augmenting the heavy depression that lies over far and near.

Then there is a visit from the Commanding Officer of the Group—who, after “kow-towing,” remains for half an hour. A man of about fifty: tall, stalwart, “official” and quiet. The blue cross of the “*Pour le Mérité*” shows in bold relief below his slightly full face that, devoid of all distinction, might just as well be that of any ordinary higher official in either the Postal or Railway Service.

“Yes, yes! the advance is still very difficult—only one step at a time—so to speak: *those over there* are putting up a stubborn resistance—apparently they have had it rubbed into them that they are to hold on at any price. And well . . . it’s not easy for us to get a move on either—But, it will come . . . oh yes! it will come right enough—”

“*Oh—no!* That would indeed be a case of the Devil spitting into the soup! But . . . of course, we must have a little patience—”

An enquiring look—met with:—

“We shall pull it off right enough . . . possibly to-morrow—or perhaps in three days . . . and we have the prospect of some special Reserves the Army Group has at its disposal being brought up and thrown in here—”

“Indeed? . . . is that so?” . . .

And the fighting goes on—and the Commanding Officer takes himself off again. The Staff Captain accompanies him: he has to telephone . . . and the King is left in the same state of worry; torn with anxieties as to the struggle now pending.

So there is to be nothing definite to-day! Perhaps to-morrow—possibly the day after—or even not for three days: *Possibly never!*

Fear and a dull dread of the future possess him: at the back of this ever-elusive “perhaps” is the ceaseless chafing and gnawing uncertainty. Just

when the end seems assured, there is no more than some partial success, the effect of which falls flat and ends in failure. His hopes set on to-morrow—and the day after to-morrow—have only too often ended in bitter disappointment . . . he can no longer feel buoyed up by talk of this kind.

The Colonel-General is having the Thermophor-hammer unpacked and here—amid the rank and rotting evidences of but recent fighting, among blood-sodden shreds of clothing and scraps of thrown-away lint—stand the bright metal utensils bearing the Royal Crown.

There is a storm brewing in the distance.

A few spoonfuls of pea-soup are taken from the silver soup-plates; a few gulps of light wine drunk from silver goblets: the time creeps along with an intolerable slowness: a few words come and go—like autumn leaves drifting through the mist.

The King talks of the glories of the Cathedral; and then he is suddenly reminded of his German Homeland, and the old Augustine Convent Church at Ravengiersburg, on the Hunsrück, and he then alludes to other particulars connected with the old romanesque architecture. He just talks on, now catching the eye of one, now of another: forces himself to go on, by way of escaping the boundless anxiety which is ever threatening. . . .

The long Guardsman—quite oblivious as to what it all may be about—nods with a semblance of lively interest: the fat little Automobile Officer—decked out with all his pretty medals—feels his head getting hot—for it reminds him of that business along of the burst tyres, at the time they were coming from Kreuznach—

And—over there—in the fighting area before Rheims, the din continues—

The Staff Captain has now come back again. He comes up breathlessly in evident haste: he has been talking to Avesnes. The General was on the point of motoring over to Rethel—to the First Army, in order to personally consider the question of increasing the weight of the attack being under-

taken at Rheims with the Leader of the Army and his Chief. The prospects of coming to a decisive conclusion in this area had not changed—and were good. Indeed a new venture was practically ready to be launched, as to which more minute details are to be sent him this evening, to Bosmont.

And at these tidings the King's hopes begin to rise: hesitatingly at first, then with greater boldness—fastening on and elaborating the possibilities now being presented. As soon as Rheims has fallen—and then—if it should be possible to deliver another heavy blow—and, perhaps, thus bury the mishap on the Marne beneath the brilliant success of this new venture. . . ! He thinks of the enemy—thinks of the effect this would have on the seething discontent at home—of the noise it would create in the world! *Those over there* would then not have much time for rejoicing before they themselves were sent reeling before this return-blow! it should come upon them in the first flush of their elation! and would thus be doubly felt.

And so the General is at present at Rethel? and closeted with good old "Kuauschke"! . . . Then, some of the words spoken to him by that old Commanding Officer—while they had paced the neglected garden at Headquarters yesterday—come back to him, giving him heart; and he seems to see the wizened, wiry old man as he stamps up and down the weedy, ill-kept paths. He seems once more to hear that thin and plaintive voice, so full of loyal convictions culled from a soldier's lifelong experience:—

"For—to *act* is everything! and we are unconquered and unbroken: entitled, as soldiers, to every belief in victory as long as we possess the will and the power to act in the face of those others—as long as we choose the new field of battle—and the day! "

XXIV

THAT same night, before the evening meal, the Quartermaster-General acquaints the King with the full particulars of the fight about to be carried on for the possession of Rheims.

The General has returned from his consultation with Below, and the fight is to be continued in an intensified form and with the addition of the Reserves, but, the situation obtaining on the enemy side, and the condition of the divisions at this moment actually engaged, make it clear that—in order to elicit any satisfactory results—further time will have to elapse . . . however great the desire for a speedy termination may seem. The interposition of new forces for the attack:—time:—undisturbed, arduous and careful labour. . . . And—in order to guard as well as may be possible against any attempts in the way of “blind attacks,” calculated to lead us astray, the General has taken the precaution to strengthen a couple of particularly quiet points along the Front—where the Crown Prince’s Army Group is situated—to the north and east of Compiègne. For, the ability of these divisions—and, more especially that of the West Front of our penetrating bend, extending from the Aisne to the Marne, to stand their ground—is a *sine qua non* for the success of the operations being carried out at the base of the East Front. And, finally, our undertaking at Rheims will actually provoke retaliation. Therefore: care, and an increased supply of strength to the divisions behind the Front Line—the alternating action of these two supports of Soissons and Rheims being thus kept firmly in mind.—

The King is also given the particulars respecting this fresh blow to the enemy now being contemplated by the Supreme Army Command. The

General is motoring over this very night to Crown Prince Rupprecht's Army Group: The impending attack is to be a blow on the British North Wing and is calculated to serve as a continuation of our success there during the Spring offensive—bringing the commanding high lying ground, from Poperinghe to Bailleul, as well as the heights about Hazebrouk, into our possession. The preliminary work for all this has been ready for some time, the heavy artillery; mine-throwers; flying-squads set out twenty-four hours ago, having left the area of Rheims and Champagne for Flanders.

The young Staff Officer is visibly elated as he recounts these new evidences of energetic and broadly-conceived plans to the King. His words are strictly those of the "expert," but his eyes shine with a joyful eagerness such as his Royal Master notes with a kindly indulgence. The King follows his account gladly: new sectional maps lie open on the table; fresh names, though already known in their previous connection with past and heavy fighting, are mentioned. His thoughts push forward to new objectives, and the results of the impending battle take form—like the scenery on a stage: the form of new possibilities, full of tantalizing promise.

The King strenuously endeavours to keep to the matter nearest to hand—it is this:—while *they* believe us to be fully occupied in reducing our gigantic Front of Attack in the Champagne area and on the Marne, *we* are actually pushing forward with two armies and shall fall upon them north of the Lys!—Anyone capable of achieving *that*—and only a few days after such terrible disappointments—has the right to hope that, with God's Help, he may yet of his own strength turn things to a happy issue!

While the Staff Captain has been engaged with the King dusk has fallen, and outside—the aged Colonel-General, the Chamberlain and the Medical Officer, stand waiting, ready dressed for dinner among the desolate fruit trees, with not as much as a speck of dust on their immaculately pressed trousers, or their shiny patent-leather pumps.

They turn impatient eyes towards the carriage comprising the King's special compartments, then put their heads together with a serious air. The Chamberlain's eyes move restlessly; they are full of reproach:—

"The irresponsible way in which that boy from the General Staff is taking up His Majesty's time, to be sure! Oh, yes—yes, of course, but after all, there is a time for all things: and it ought to be possible . . ." and his anxious eyes now turn towards the compartments where the kitchens are situated and where the cook has had to put everything back by some half-hour—and, well . . . no dinner is the better for *that*!

The Colonel-General passes a well-kept hand over his ribs and observes:—"His Majesty has been doing too much for his strength during these last three days . . . *far too much*, and things cannot go on like this: after all, *someone* is bound to bear the responsibility for these excesses: day after day—and from morning to night out there . . . and then, in between it all, wretched bad nights—no! this cannot continue! His Majesty has been undertaking more than is consistent . . . he looks worn out . . . used-up . . . in need of rest!"

And the network of tiny veins covering the old officer's cheek-bones are a deep red, while his sharp falcon-eyes dart reproach at the Medical Staff Officer, nailing him, so to speak, as the culprit responsible for His Majesty's lack of rest. Yet that officer can do no more than confirm the fact that all this excitement . . . well, yes: the urgent need—from the medical point of view, of a complete day's rest shall for reasons of health be most seriously put before His Majesty . . . and, thinks he: this will afford some possibility of getting time to write a decent letter home and some chance of reading a good book—

"That is so—" nods the Colonel-General, in full agreement: "Besides which," he adds, "the Chiefs of the Cabinets tell me that they would be only too thankful for the opportunities such a pause

would offer; they have a surfeit of work waiting to be put before His Majesty—and to-morrow, therefore, would be just the occasion . . .”

So it happens that all are in perfect agreement on the subject. Therefore, later on, after dinner and in the course of conversation, the King is attacked from three sides at once touching the above proposal to which he readily consents—especially in view of the heavy accumulation of work now delaying the Cabinets, as well as the Foreign Office.

To-morrow, therefore, is to be a day of rest.

XXV

BREAKFAST has been ordered for half-past eight, but before that hour the young Staff Captain has already called up the Supreme Army Command.

A young officer is on duty at the other end and replies to the enquiries being made in a quick and worried voice:—

“Anything fresh?—No: nothing particular has come through from Rheims. The first new Reserve forces have been brought up—the work of reduction has begun . . . things are just going on quietly, but—”

“Yes? ”—

There is some slight delay, and then the voice continues:—“In the hill district, on the Adre, the enemy last night took up again the interrupted attack he had begun yesterday, bringing a more strongly organized pressure to bear: but he has been repulsed everywhere. Then, down on the south side of the Marne we have begun with all care to break off operations. . . . What more is there to say?—Well, the company had a bad time of it what with the insane firing and then, all the lines of communication being

a mark for bombs. It has only been with the greatest difficulty that the most necessary requisites have been got through . . . partially owing to the obstruction caused by derelict planes! . . . What else?—Well, yes: Some rumour or other has come in—but so far we are quite in the dark about it— . . . Well—it's this: something has happened to the right wing of the Seventh, and—apparently, farther up too—to the Ninth: probably they hadn't been keeping a look-out again. But, up to now, the reports are contradictory—very confused . . . well, yes: they *are* alarming, but we can get no clear picture of the whole thing—only this much is certain: the enemy attacked and got into our trenches at daybreak this morning: French and Americans. It's quite likely that in their first surprise they've made more of it than the affair really warrants . . . we're not going to lose our heads by that sort of 'nervyness'! But the fact remains that there has been some beastly local mess . . . and—I say, Sigurd . . . for the present this is quite 'unofficial'—you understand?—We shall know more in about an hour's time: Just ring us up again then—what? . . . Very well, then: So-long! . . . The General? oh, he's over there with Rupprecht's Army Division . . . hardly likely to get back till this evening! ” And the apparatus buzzes.

The Staff Captain hangs up the receiver:—“ over on the right wing of the Seventh—and farther up—at the Ninth—? ” and he visualizes the map: that is the spot at which our great bend, extending from the Aisne to the Marne, is most vulnerable towards the west . . . and—for a few seconds something keeps him occupied with this thought: his mind goes back to the General's last remark with reference to the pressure at this point . . . then he shakes off the idea: probably some wildly exaggerated rumour—in an hour's time they will have got some clear account. But it takes less than an hour. . . . It comes directly after breakfast. They are still seated at table, talking, when an orderly comes to

apprise the Staff Captain that he is wanted at the telephone—wanted *at once*:—Avesnes.

The King, whom no word escapes, looks across attentively: a shadow of surprised and questioning anxiety passes over his face—his eyes seem to ask:—“What is it now?” But he only smiles to the young officer, saying:—“All right, my dear boy! and then come straight and give me your report over there!”

For a second the Staff Captain stands erect—at attention. . . . “Certainly, Your Majesty!” Then he is gone. Silence falls on all; they seem to be expecting something.

No sooner is he out of sight than he tears along the narrow passages—the orderly can hardly keep up with him: the servants he meets on his way he pushes aside with a “just let me pass, my boy!” while his top-boots clatter and his spurs ring out. He is about to know . . . ! and he hurries unceremoniously through the King’s private compartments—whatever does it matter! for he suddenly senses a consciousness of some great disaster. . . . Old Schulz’s face is a picture in the presence of such intrusion, and in spite of his state of tense excitement, it almost makes him laugh as he runs on—

At last he has reached the sound-proof cell with its heavily padded door, and—taking up the receiver—gives his name . . . listens . . . “Here—!”

At the other end of the wire is the same young officer who had spoken before: now he is reporting by order of the Field-Marshal, and his hurried words stumble one over the other, as if his throat were tight:—“Yes: the reports from the armies have come through . . . as yet they are only partial, of course, but enough for us to get some insight as to the damage done. Rotten: worse than anything the first reports led one to believe.—It has, in fact, been a major-attack, with forces far outnumbering ours: with tank divisions massed on a scale never before attempted, leading. The attack started along the entire sector from the

Aisne to the Marne; advancing more particularly from the great forest districts about Villers-Cotterêts, and without much in the way of previous indication—without anything special in the way of Artillery . . . no more than a brief firing-attack—and our front defensive simply caved-in under the blow . . . lost its head . . . went under. Yes: a sort of panic!—They were divisions we had hitherto always taken to be sound . . . just gone to pieces; used up; made prisoners—thousands of them! ”—

“ Good Lord! ” and the young officer’s hand trembles as he presses the receiver to his ear. His face is pale—he feels as if he were choking. The news almost stuns him, and while making a strenuous effort to keep calm and collected—not to allow his emotions to get the better of his habitual “ official ” manner—he feels the hot wave rising—threatening to sweep aside all conventional reserve—as with all his boyish devotion aroused in grateful and sympathetic regard for the unfortunate man, who has ever shown him so much gracious kindness, he thinks:—“ And I . . . I shall have to deal him this blow! ”

“ Sigurd!—Are you there still? ”

He is feeling so confused, that he has to grope his way back, as it were, to the present situation—

Wever . . . it is Wever holding the line at the other end . . . of course . . . and he says:—

“ Yes—yes! ”

“ Are you taking notes? ”

“ Yes—yes! ” And his disengaged hand reaches out nervously for writing-block and pencil.

“ Well, then: the line all along from Ambleny to Chézy has been invaded; the incursions having extended particularly far in the direction of Soissons and in the area of Savières; some five, six and seven kilometres deep. Here then, all possible means of support for the retreat will have to be thrown in, so as to organize a new offensive—”

“ Will the division be able to hold out then, at all events? ” And as he speaks he is staring down at

the white writing-block, tracing fanciful curves on the paper.—

“We don’t know! everything that can be done for their support is being done: but, of course, it all requires time. And . . . should they get through in the meantime it will mean the very devil—!”

The voice at the other end sounds hoarse and choking. “Should they get through in the meantime . . .” and the Staff Captain seems to see that curve on the Marne with its forward extension packed with divisions—all fighting: with enormous quantities of supplies and all the unwieldy and gigantic paraphernalia of an army: . . . *should they in the meantime get through! Then* everything would be over—gone—to pieces—cut off! It would mean Catastrophe!

He gasps,—and—hardly knowing why at this moment of direst distress the name should come to his lips, he asks:—“The General?”—

“He’s over at Rupprecht’s: he was informed at once and is already taking measures from there. He will probably be back here by about two o’clock in order to consult—”

“And what does the Field-Marshal say?”

“He is very grave—but as quiet as usual. He will await the General’s return before coming to any final determination. But he desires that His Majesty should be acquainted at once and without reserve with the full seriousness of the situation, for it must be taken into account that—should things go on in this way, it may be impossible to prevent the worst from happening . . . therefore . . .”

There is silence, nothing but the faint, very faint tapping of the telegraphic machine next door heard through the thick padded walls.

“Yes—yes . . . of course—” and he hangs up the receiver.

A few minutes later the Staff Captain is standing in the King’s compartment, with the few maps he has hastily gathered together rustling slightly in his tremulous hands.

The King is seated, bending over some documents: he is apparently much engrossed; he must have left the dining-saloon immediately after breakfast.

"Yes, my dear —, in a moment. . . ."

The Staff Captain waits, and gazes down on to the wave of silver-grey hair; on to the tanned cheek, that has grown so haggard and shrunken within the last few days. He knows this apparent calm; knows, too, that beneath it all, his heart is beating in anxious expectancy; that this attitude of absorbed interest is but assumed, while the letters upon the paper before his eyes are dancing—without even conveying the sense of the written words to him.

Then the King pushes the papers abruptly aside and, turning his head, looks up:—

"Now—if you please. . . ."

But he gives a dry gulp as his eyes light on the pale and agitated face of the young officer, sensing—with something akin to clairvoyance—that some terrible and inevitable calamity is bearing down upon him . . . about to overwhelm him. Yet, with a slight grimace, the pitiful ghost of a smile, an attempt at braving fate with the very last beat of his heart—he asks curtly:—

"Well, now . . . has the Oracle at Avesnes vouchsafed any solution?"

At first there is no more than a nod on the part of the young officer: he stands erect and soldierly, ready to fulfil his stern and difficult duty. And now in this silence, broken only by the indistinct, and cheery chatter of the sappers at work on the railway-line, he begins, in a husky voice, to give his report:—

"Your Majesty, the Field-Marshal desires that you should be acquainted with the fact that the enemy attacked our lines this morning in the area between the Aisne and the Marne—south-west of Soissons: that he surprised us with superior forces and that he has achieved considerable success along the entire line of attack—"

Every drop of blood seems to have left the King's

face: it has assumed a greyish-yellow tinge and the pupils of his wide-open eyes seem to have shrunk with horror, as he contemplates this unexampled disaster. The Staff Captain resumes . . . yet as he speaks, he feels as though some other had slipped within his erect and soldierly figure, and were talking instead:—

“Our first position has been broken through—and, unfortunately, to a very considerable extent, while there has also been great loss in the matter of prisoners and war material. The Supreme Army Command regards the situation as particularly grave—”

No word escapes the King's lips: he only stares out in front of him with glassy wide-open eyes, and the chin and cheeks, now angular and bony, are twitching. Then the head sinks as though completely oblivious of the surrounding world, and his gaze seems riveted on the green leather surface of the table in front of him. He nods a few times—just a few times . . . then seems to be saying something—yet it amounts to no more than an opening and a closing of his lips . . . though the Staff Captain thinks he can distinguish one word. . . .

“*The end—*”

The young officer takes himself together, and approaches a step nearer:—

“Your Majesty . . . the Supreme Army Command hopes that we may yet succeed in stemming the onrush . . . they are fighting. . . .”

“Yes—”

Then again there is silence.

The sappers outside have come nearer: they are at work quite close now; scratching about at something just beneath this carriage—the scraping and raking can be distinctly heard. The King raises his hand slightly: the officer is at the window in a moment, calling something out to the men. Then, a sudden cessation of all sound: tools are gathered together; steps recede with all care and the window is closed again.

The King jerks his chin forward:—

"The map, if you please." The voice sounds exhausted and colourless. Then, as it lies before him he gazes on it bitterly—with dull eyes. Here, where gaps, trenches, approaches, wire-entanglements and other obstacles are indicated by a confused mass of blue traceries all along the line between the Aisne and the Marne the French are now in possession—victorious. And somewhere—far back, behind the line—forces are being hurriedly got together, in an effort to stem their further advance.

He can hardly realize it all—

The Staff Captain continues repeating what he has heard, while with a bit of charcoal he draws a couple of thick arrows to indicate the direction in which the attacks have been made.

The King hardly utters a word as the discourse proceeds and—for moments at a time—he feels as though all this could not be actual, but rather some heavy senseless dream which, nevertheless, he is incapable of shaking off—from which he is unable to fight his way through into waking consciousness—

"And at two o'clock?—" he enquires—"At two o'clock, did you say, the General will be back?"

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

The King has taken up a kilometre compass lying on the table and is twirling it aimlessly between his fingers: the action is unconscious and his thoughts are far away—groping about . . . ah, now they have reached the matter they were striving after. . . .

It is a sentence—the fragment of a sentence—and he clings to it . . . cannot get away from it:

"So long as we choose the new field of battle and the day. . . ." Then he ponders, sees and admits:—

"No longer is it *we*:—but *they*, who have chosen their battle-field and their day. . . . *Rheims*? No! they have knocked that from our hands: they had other desires—and were the first to act as they willed: and that will is now paramount . . . this is the swing-back of the pendulum . . . it is the end—"

He passes his hand across his brow—surely there was something else he was groping after . . . oh, yes—!

“There still is, of course—” and then with a strong attempt to appear calm and matter-of-fact, he says:—

“I should like to have a report from Avesnes every hour—” and some odd thought keeps going confusedly through his brain—tripping up his words—it is “every hour one tablespoonful” . . . and he tries to free himself from it:—

“Everything that is known is to be reported—and will you tell the Field-Marshal that I shall be with him at four o’clock? By that time, I take it, they will have come to some agreement as to what is to be done. And will you be so good as to let the Colonel-General know my plans, so that he can give the requisite orders?”

The young officer stands at attention:—

“As Your Majesty commands!”

The King pushes the map slightly aside, and the Staff Captain steps forward and folds it together: his fingers are shaking—and the King looking down on them, nods gently—then he looks up and meets the eyes the other is trying to avert—he lifts his hand and lets it sink again:—then, with a remnant of voice, the cordial warmth of which shows even through his present anguish, he says:—

“Ah—my dear—” and gives a dry, choking gulp.

XXVI

THE forenoon is passed in work.

The King, mindful of his engagements, listens to the discourses—as had been arranged.

The complacent, unsoldierly-looking Military Chief is with him now and is—with a certain sadistic

good humour—demanding the scalps of quite half a dozen of the Commanding Officers, as well as others, concerned in the non-success of the offensive, while at the same time, presenting his proposals for their successors.

He also listens to the latest Wonders of the Deep, as narrated by the Admiral . . . hears all the over-worked Civil Chief and the Counsel of Legation, with his inscrutable smile, have to say.

He follows all the dissertations of these gentlemen in silence; does his best to force his attention to keep to the subjects in hand, yet finds it impossible, even for one moment, to escape his present searching anguish. Dimly he senses:—

"They are noticing it: " . . . seems to see it in their faces, voices, gestures—all fraught, he thinks, with a barely restrained curiosity: Surmises? . . . Enquiries? . . .

The stout General's Baden accent seems too pronounced to-day . . . and the Admiral, usually so spare of his words, is far too loquacious with his "proofs" and his "tonnage." . . .

Only to one does the King say aught as to what has happened in the fighting area and convey any hint of his anxieties; and this one is his old friend, who nods, and with quiet, serious eyes, ventures to offer a few human words of consolation—

And, in between this coming and going of divers people, with their letters, documents, and portfolios, the Staff Captain puts in an appearance some two or three times, and gives his report.

There is nothing very informing about these scraps of news that come filtering in up to midday: the only matters that stand out clearly are the causes of that first surprise. The fate of the line that is now being contested, and which it is hoped they will be able to hold, for the present against all further assault, is also pretty well known: the Savières area; this practically runs through Kerzy and seems—to the south—to divide the village of Courchamps. Owing to this, there appears conclusive evidence that the divisions primarily thrown

into the south-west of Soissons became disorganized under the pressure of suddenly appearing masses, whose advance had been facilitated under the cover of an artificial fog, set up in the wooded districts about Villers-Cotterêts, and it was here that the enemy—with fleets of tanks and masses of infantry—had first penetrated to any great extent, forming a deep gap. It may be taken for granted that the object in view is to push through to Soissons—and beyond—and thus, by prearranged action, undertaken in concert with the increased attacks now going forward in the woods about Rheims, to cut off the neck of our protruding bend of ground lying between the Aisne and the Marne, as also south of the Marne. Nor can we expect that the enemy is going to be content with his initial success, for with every hour the fight is assuming the dimensions of a battle waging over some thirty to forty kilometres of the entire Front, the importance of which outweighs all previous undertakings.

The King remains in his working-compartments until he goes to lunch. He has but one desire: to get somehow or other through the time that he has before him and to maintain an “aloofness,” the presence of which he can himself hardly grasp, in regard to all these occurrences, and so ultimately reach the hour when he is to see the two men at Avesnes.

A thought flashes rapidly through his brain:—he feels himself to be like a sleep-walker, gazing fixedly and with averted eyes into some empty waste—who dare not turn his eyes downwards . . . lest he break down—

He has, indeed, to exercise some self-control to go across to the dining-saloon, where he will know all eyes to be upon him . . . feeling—prying—ferreting . . . full of curious enquiry. But they should gather nothing from his demeanour; even under the pressure of this set-back he would maintain his kingly dignity unshaken—

And so, with a cheery word of greeting and a

brave attempt at a smile on his grey, worn features he joins his gentlemen-in-waiting and takes his seat at the table. Every movement of his shall show his calm and assured confidence.

There are flowers in front of his place—he inhales their fragrance and thanks the Chamberlain seated opposite with a gracious gesture—thinking in his bitterness: *what a comedy!*

They had all been waiting for his coming to give them their cue, as it were: would he appear to be depressed? if so, it would be for them to raise their eyebrows and firmly compress their lips. Would he be out of humour? then they too would be equally of opinion that nothing but the most unheard-of mismanagement *up there*—at the Front—could have led to such a mess as this!

But—he had almost smiled, and had thanked him for the flowers!—

His desire, therefore, is that we shall neither know, nor have heard anything about it: and the bright eyes of the Chamberlain flash to the right and to the left: he has the air of a conductor, casting a glance over the members of his orchestra, before raising his baton for the overture to commence . . . and a thrill passes through the double row of gentlemen: inaudibly; but none the less distinctly, has the cue been given, and they now know that the part they have to play is that of unsuspecting ease: a free and careless expression—tempered with tact . . . and yet—it is hardly all plain sailing.

For it soon becomes evident that the King is absent and *distract*, and more than once the conversation comes suddenly to a standstill. And then he seizes with sudden avidity upon some word—or some question, and—clinging to it—talks—and talks—and talks.

Hunting? . . . oh, yes—of course . . . hunting . . . and when this has been dismissed there remains no more than the faint tinkle of the knives and forks.

The Chamberlain feels worried and he thinks:—

“What a pity that we’ve never been able to get

him into the hunting field during the whole time of the war! ”

Down at the lower end of the table a flaxen-haired young officer is whispering some yarn about a marvellous bag he had had the good fortune to secure when home on leave at his aunt's country place—and then the Prince throws himself into the breach and resuming the subject, says loudly:—

“ Your Majesty will remember Nikki Esterházy . . . well, I was at the last battue held at his place—but he's as deaf as a post now, and so he said to me:— ‘ Hans,’ said he, ‘ I don't know how it is but I've noticed something quite new about my stags . . . they never roar now—the Lord only knows what's taken them, but they're just as quiet as mice and only do *so*—’ ” and the Prince places his hands together and opens them like the action of two jaws, while his watery little slits of eyes look for approbation—

But the King's nod denotes no interest:—

“ The old Prince Esterházy? . . . and so he is deaf—is he? ” . . . and he feels as if he could no longer stand the whole farce; feels as if he must get up and go over to the solitude of his study again. He is trembling and his heart is full to overflowing.

Yet, in a moment he is himself again: some connection of ideas—oh, yes! . . . if was the mention of that old gentleman and—also because he had noticed in looking at the almanack that to-morrow is the Commemoration Day of the French declaration of war in 1870: and he calls to mind the attitude assumed at that time by Austria-Hungary—then, seizing on this he gives passionate expression to his feelings on the subject. Talks—while the Counsel of Legation shows his teeth in pleasurable embarrassment, and the Civil Chief gazes down on those slender hands of his that now move with nervous apprehension. Talks of the secret treaty that had been drawn up between the Dual Empire and France shortly before “ Seventy ”—

“ Yes!—Austria was to have gone against

Prussia . . . a *quid pro quo* for Königgrätz!—so as to secure the precedence! But that very cautious personage, Archduke Albrecht, got a clause inserted into that treaty—it was to the effect that Austria-Hungary should only join the French *after they should have crossed the Rhine*. Directly after Saarbrücken the gentlemen in Paris had begun to call loudly upon Austria to hit back, but Vienna had answered:—‘Get across the Rhine first!’ . . . and then, after the battle of Wörth, Emperor Francis Joseph dismissed the matter with—‘No: now it can’t be done!’ ”

He pauses for a moment, and then adds abruptly:—

“Yes: a good many experiences have been made when dealing with the House of Hapsburg—”

Then he ceases—though visibly excited.

The battle of Wörth . . . the triumphant course then taken and—the endless horrors of to-day! to say nothing of all that this protégé of the Jesuits and his lot are up to again in the way of under-hand intrigues carried on behind his back—behind Germany’s back!

Betrayal and Villainy!—and he feels the choking, threatening horror of it all assailing him once more.

Quietly a neighbouring hand moves the little bronze tray towards him: he takes a cigarette and begins to smoke in quick, spasmodic puffs: nervously, and without any sense of enjoyment. His thoughts are far away from his present circle.

Then of a sudden, he turns to the Colonel-General, with a—

“When do we start?” . . .

“In twenty minutes—should Your Majesty be graciously so inclined!”

He nods concurrence and rises.

There is a pushing-back and a moving of chairs.

The slick little Jäger-Captain nudges the Counsel of Legation and gives a furtive smile and a wink in the direction of the Colonel-General—whispering:—

“ ‘*Should Your Majesty be graciously so inclined*’—I say, Baron, doesn’t the old boy know how to roll it off his tongue!—*some style!* Eh? jolly smart, too! ”

XXVII

N O more than two cars tear along the grey roads and through the sparsely falling rain—past Vervins and La Chapelle—to Avesnes. All the wonted state of Leibjäger, Staff Trumpeter, Standard-bearer, and Army Service non-commissioned officers has been left behind.

In the first car sits the King, with the Staff Captain and the Count. In the second are the Colonel-General, the Guardsman and the Staff Doctor. The drive seems endless and is oppressively silent. Now and again the King addresses a word or two to the officers seated behind him and then lapses into silence. Everything around strikes him as inimical: the dull and silent landscape; the worn-out and used-up condition of things animate and inanimate. The grey, huddled-up men they come upon from time to time in the rain look as though weighed down with invisible loads, as they stand by the roadside, or hurry out of reach of the splashing mud, squirting from the on-rushing wheels. There seems, too, a glimmer of vindictiveness in their eyes and about their brutish countenances, as they stare after the car on which the Standard is fluttering and cracking—

Only in the second car is there any attempt at conversation. The Colonel-General is “chewing” at the situation. Yet, as a matter of fact, he feels rather handicapped by the presence of the Medical Staff Officer: for—after all—a “medical man” . . . !

And, finally, what to his mind would seem to be the worst thing about the whole lamentable business

is the painfully difficult position His Majesty has been placed in by this reverse: such a thing should not be permitted! and at this moment, too! when, for the sake of the Monarchical Ideal and—for the personal prestige of His Majesty, any such additional burdens are by no means desirable. Why—we have only to read the newspapers in order to see—to know!—what evil results might supervene. The gentlemen of the Supreme Army Command should, were they not completely certain, have anticipated—and have provided so that His Majesty need not have been exposed in this manner. But there—! they advertise, as it were, a new offensive movement—under the very eyes of His Majesty—and then . . . wind up with a collapse of this sort! And he shakes his noble and confused old head as though here were a matter that had simply been badly stage-managed: arranged by some hand not properly alive to the responsibilities they were incurring to the Dynasty—and more especially, to His Majesty himself.

And the long Major, who is completely in accord with all these arguments, says:—

“ There—! that’s about it! ”

But, in truth, he is not inclined to ponder these matters, their connections, or their consequences, too deeply: he is, of course, honestly annoyed, but his vocabulary commands but a few general expressions such as:—“ Beastly - rot - the - whole-caboodle! ” and further, “ the God-accurséd Jew-boys! ” . . . while, the sooner the whole mess is wiped up, the better pleased will he be. After all—everything is bound to have an end—sooner or later! *Four years!* Heavens!! It seems almost impossible to remember what Potsdam looks like!!! And if only those lazy fellows at the Foreign Office were not so completely God-forsaken. . . .

Avesnes—at last.

The cars proceed more slowly up the steep road.

It is exactly four o’clock when they halt before the red villa of the Department of the Army Executive.

Their coming has been announced and as the King mounts the steps at the entrance, the Field-Marshal advances to meet him: dignified and leisurely—neither hurrying, nor hesitating—and with his adjutant and son-in-law following at a respectful distance behind him. It is dusk in the hall: the lofty doors admit no more than a cool green tinge of the afternoon light. It throws a shade over the features of those entering from without—only outlining their figures and playing about their shoulder-straps and grey-covered helmets. But it throws into bold relief the others now advancing from the interior of the building.

His greeting to his Supreme War Lord is calm and respectful. The King stretches out his hand to the Field-Marshal and his head shakes violently: the lips move, but his voice is not forthcoming. A thousand contradictory feelings are warring in his heart.

The bitterness of recent days has tortured him all through this weary drive: he had been nursing it with the full intention of pouring out its pent-up force before this man; yet now, it seems to slip away from him. A sure and firmly-rooted power of passing undismayed through all fate's buffetings seems visible in those small and deeply-set eyes; reproach, distrust, suspicion—all seem to hide themselves before them, as if ashamed.

The King senses the superior force of this Giant: his presence seems to vouch for security and protection. All at once the overpowering desire is on him to confide in this one man. . . .

"Your Majesty—" the voice is so deep, warm and quiet . . . that the King involuntarily thinks of something the Count had remarked not long since, when they had been talking of the Field-Marshal:—

"He has a voice at which one could warm oneself on a winter's day! "

And, while the adjutants relieve the visitor of helmet, sword and cloak, the old officer's eyes rest with a kindly interest upon the King's worn and restless features, those features to which he is so

strenuously endeavouring to give some semblance of calm and reticence.

Then the Field-Marshal extends a courteous greeting to the officers in attendance and in his slow, vibrant voice, observes:—

“Your Majesty has experienced much during these past heavy days—the war has indeed exhibited a hard face. I am glad to be able to welcome Your Majesty here again . . . and, if Your Majesty desires—?”

His eyes turn towards the staircase: the King nods. His ardent wish is to hear!—to hear!—to be alone with these two . . . and to know the truth: to know what they think as to coming events . . . and he ascends the stairs with hurried feet.

“The General got back two hours ago—I met him at the station, and we were able soon to come to some understanding with regard to the situation—”

They are on the staircase: Spurs and swords are clanking in the rear of the King and the Field-Marshal . . . and the King thinks:—

“Was it his cold confidence in himself that kept him from being present to meet me down below? or was it nervousness owing to the failure and débâcle of his plans—? a bad conscience at the pleasure he has provided us with?! or—has he entrenched himself behind the excuse that I had only announced my coming to the Field-Marshal—?”

He is pale and feels a shiver of excitement run through his frame. On the landing, and having reached the green-padded door, he turns round for a moment and his eye meets that of the Colonel-General—who understands; and it is he alone who follows into the room, when the Field-Marshal throws the door open.

Again that merciless, glaring light. The General is seated before his writing-table, bending over documents: he now looks round; lets the eyeglass drop from his eye and, rising quickly, advances a few steps to meet the King.

His movements are firm, angular and abrupt; his bearing erect; his greeting respectful. He says no

more than a few words—brief, and to the point. He gives the impression of coming out of a different world: one of work; work; work: and that he is trying to adapt himself as best he can to the duty of the present hour, since his King desires a discourse . . . some enlightenment—some account. Yet the suppressed excitement glittering in his eyes and occasionally displayed by a twitch of the compressed lips, has obviously nothing to do with aught in the way of confusion: it is only a sign of the feverish thoughts and energies possessing him; evidences of the fight he is putting up against these unpleasant cross-currents of fate.

No: there is nothing about this man that savours of uneasiness, despondency or depression: he believes in himself and in his acts to the very same extent he did before this breakdown.

Somewhere—deep down in the depths of his heart, tortured as it is with a hunger begotten of sheer agony, the King seems to feel all this—and it comes to him almost with a sense of disappointment. As if it might have afforded him a certain amount of relief—had he, for once, seen this unbending nature humble . . . and, by way of opening the conversation, he says:—

“You have just completed an enormous tour, Your Excellency—”

The General is aware of the slight stress laid on “Your Excellency”—it is unusual for him to use this form of address: it has always been “General” or, “my dear General”; is he out of humour? does this mean disfavour?—Yet it troubles him no more than the transient buzzing of a gnat.

“I have, of course, made the speediest use of opportunities, Your Majesty . . . we had not a moment to lose.”

And he pushes a chair forward for the King.

No: he would rather stand. And so they form a little group round the great map-table, while,—farther back—immovable—and resting on the hilt of his upright sword, stands the silent knightly figure of the old Colonel-General.

For a moment there is not a sound.

The King stares straight in front: the glare of the light pains him: he is biting his lips and his right hand fidgets with the little gold tassels on the breast-cords of his uniform.

This silence is unbearable: it is for them to speak: what has happened? . . . *What has happened?!—* Then, with a quick motion of the head, he indicates the table where the maps are lying spread open . . . and now the Field-Marshal takes the lead:—

“ I presume that Your Majesty would like in the first place to know what we have gathered as to the present condition—and how the difficult situation in which we now find ourselves has come about—”

The King nods—his eyelids flicker: the Field-Marshal’s words come far too slowly for the feverish state of mind he is in. But that officer is not to be put out of his habitual calm, and continues:—

“ According to my mind, the general picture of the battle must be kept in view in order to rightly appreciate what has taken place. We here have an extending square, of which three sides push forward into the enemy’s Front. On the south Front, as well as on the east Front of this square, heavy fighting has been going on for days past:—initial successes were obtained; while on the west Front things have been comparatively quiet. We know that the enemy has massed heavy forces here too, but for this we have made provisions. What we have been able to obtain in the way of massed divisions and Reserves should—with care—have sufficed to render us secure against all emergencies—But that care, and unfailing watchfulness on the part of the troops, has not been maintained—I do not wish to make a scapegoat of anyone . . . though in war, the maxim that *one* must take the responsibility for all—also *all* for one, becomes doubly imperative:—Lord! we are all of us but sinners together!—But I am speaking of impressions the effects of which troops are ever open to—and which might easily extend to the Staff as well. Night and day they have heard the fire from

the actions going on about the Marne and in front of Rheims . . . they hear of successes: that we are fighting south of the river and have made some advance in the wooded hills. Then, too, the rumour is started that the enemy is everywhere in retreat—that he is throwing all his Reserves into the balance at Rheims and about the River, and has no thought of attacking hereabouts: then vigilance becomes slack . . . and the troops are lulled into a sense of false security—they feel almost as if they were in Rest-Quarters. . . .”

And here he pauses, to draw a deep and full breath—

The King is listening attentively: he is riveted by this quiet flow of words, which seems to paint the disaster in such broad and sweeping strokes—and at the same time—lays bare our human weaknesses.

And then the Field-Marshal resumes:—

“Yes,” he says. “But suddenly this idyll is broken in upon by a surprise attack . . . it falls like lightning—striking through the morning mists—I have been informed that when it took place numbers of the fighting men had just gone out to the harvest fields. Well . . . naturally . . . no one can be expected to engage tanks and machine-guns with pitchforks and scythes . . . although I can readily believe that our men of 1914 would have done so—and even conquered,—by the miracle of their self-sacrifice—and the faith that was in them. . . . But to-day things are otherwise; and we can but take account of people and things as they are—”

Here the King breaks in. . . .

“Then—did the men waver?”

Calmly the ponderous old soldier meets the eye of the other and says:—

“We had credited the Reinforcements—especially those of Watter and Winckler’s groups,—which had been fighting south-west of Soissons—with greater powers of resistance. It transpires that the troops *did* waver—we have sustained a great loss . . . especially in the way of prisoners—”

He pauses; considers for a moment, and then returns to his delineation of the affair:—

“As Your Majesty will be aware—the attack was made with an advance-guard of many hundreds of tanks, and—apparently,—with tanks of a new design, small, and capable of great mobility: these, having advanced, were able to establish themselves as cover for the machine-guns, and thus the picture gained is that after a minimum of time, the front line had been penetrated at numberless points and our men were simply fighting for their skins, while their rear was at the same time exposed to further fire from the enemy’s machine-guns. What actually took place at the time, and amid all this confusion, no one quite knows . . . but the troops became aware that they were surrounded—and lost their heads . . . such a thing is catching. Wherever the enemy advanced, he outflanked the neighbouring sections still fighting, widening to either side the gaps he had already made in our line. Side by side, in an uninterrupted storm of attack, came French and Americans . . . and the situation became more and more serious. For a time it seemed as though it would be impossible to further delay the disaster to our arms—as if catastrophe were inevitable: not till our rear-support had come into action, could those of the second line of defence, by dint of self-sacrificing and heroic fighting—stem the onslaught, and form a new line. Such is the course of events—as far as we have been able to ascertain—”

The King nods:—tugs at his coat . . . then asks in dry, abrupt tones:—

“Will this new line be held?”

The Field-Marshal looms out big, square, and unperturbed:—

“We can hardly tell that for certain, Your Majesty. We now stand between the Aisne and the Marne, on the eve of a new battle of attack from the enemy, and it may last for several days: it is certain that we shall have to reckon with further storming on a great scale and—as becomes more and more apparent—we shall have, in the first front line

alone, more than a dozen fresh divisions of attack brought up against us—and, presumably, there will be still more behind these. Besides which, we must not visualize the line we hold at the present moment as being part of a connected system of divisions, or even as an ideal position of defence. But one thing can be said, and that is, that the worst danger, which lay in demoralization—owing to the success of the enemy—has now been surmounted. Whatever he may now decide on doing will be met by counter-action on our part.”

And again he pauses.

The King, listening, only fastens on the meaning of one phrase: “The worst danger is surmounted . . . *but*—” and all his repressed fears seem to threaten him from behind the restriction of this one word. Oppressed and worn, yet wishing to show a calm and thoughtful front, he enquires:—

“Then—shall we have to retreat farther?—Have we to yield up more ground?”

He can hardly control his voice, and the words as they come from his lips sound brusque and almost ungracious.

The Field-Marshal senses the fevered, flashing glance, and in a quiet and respectful manner he gives the information demanded:—

“We have made all provisions, Your Majesty, such as may enable us to confidentially hope that the enemy’s further attacks will not reach their objectives, and that in this battle, which sees us assuming the defensive, we may be in a position to maintain our stand. Whether we find ourselves a few kilometres farther east, or farther west, cannot—when measured according to the enemy’s plan, which was to cut us off by this blow at our bend on the Marne—be regarded as of any practical importance. Yet, should it become necessary, a little later on, for us to place further proposals before Your Majesty, these would apply to no more than tactical reasons of definite importance, or—possibly—considerations as to the general situation—”

The King’s eyelids flicker . . . he is holding his

head slightly on one side and is groping after the meaning at the back of this last sentence: he seems to sense in it the presence of some hidden purpose . . . something they are loath to disclose to him: something they may, perhaps, only lay bare by degrees. So with a careful deliberation he says:—

"In that case I should be glad, if in determining the general situation, the question as to the effect this may have in view of the very uneasy feeling prevailing at home, as also on our allies, and on other foreign countries, will be taken into consideration. At home our trouble with the worried, as well as the worrying element of the population is increasing day by day, and the meaning of such obstacles cannot, in the interests of the Crown, be over-estimated—"

Here the slight clink of a sword becomes audible in the background; the old Colonel-General has straightened his figure—and his hoary old head gives an almost imperceptible nod of agreement.

The Field-Marshal replies, in his most professional tones:—

"Certainly, Your Majesty: these matters lie heavily enough on our minds, even though I have naturally in the first place considered the purely military point of view committed to our care: our duty for the safety of the Army and that of reaching our military destination."

A pause.

He then slowly turns sideways to where the Quartermaster-General is standing—then meets the eyes of the King, and says:—

"Perhaps my comrade may now—?"

"Certainly!" The word comes quick and short, for the King's thoughts had been elsewhere. No: nothing the Field-Marshal has been saying can still his suspicions: *something* is being kept in the background— He looks towards the General, who is ready—and on the defensive. A slight cough, and a stiffening of the firm soldierly figure. Then he speaks: his sharp, cutting voice is like the insupportable glare of the room itself—: it pounces on

all the questions—leaves nothing in doubt or uncertainty.

“I may observe, Your Majesty, that I received the news of the enemy's attack this morning, while we were in consultation regarding our new undertaking in Flanders:—a painful surprise for the Supreme Army Command.”

The King moves his head and interrupts:—

“Then it *was* an actual surprise?!”

The short and bitter question has the ring of a challenge—there is heat and irritation in it . . . but the General continues the elaboration of his thoughts as though the question had never been put:—

“The surprise did not lie in the attack at all; for we were bound to expect that from the moment our advance east of Rheims came to a standstill, thus enabling Marshal Foch to dispose of his Reserves in another manner. It lay in the failure of our first line and the consequent extent of the enemy's initial success.”

And the General approaches the map-table, adjusts his eyeglass, and looks down at the great outspread sheet.

“As the Field-Marshal has already remarked, what we had been led to expect from the divisions put in south-east of Soissons—judging by their former bearing—failed in its fulfilment. Yet the divisions kept in reserve farther south—the Fifty-first Reserves, the Forty-fifth Reserves, and the Fortieth, were also, unfortunately, unable to maintain a united and closed front of defence—nevertheless, they are now holding the enemy bravely at bay on the heights west of the road from Soissons to Château-Thierry. . . . If Your Majesty would care to observe the line?”

But the King raised his hand, as much as to say: “I know . . . what use is all this! get on . . . get on! . . .”

He is standing a couple of steps from the map-table, looking on to and across it from afar:—

“The dangers now imminent, owing to the depth of the break-through—confront us with the task of

making the attacked frontal sectors as secure as may be possible against any further storming. For they form the shield covering the Seventh Army fighting in the bend of the Marne, and it is only by ensuring the safety of our west flank that we shall be able to carry out further operations about Rheims and allow of an unhurried and orderly withdrawal on the south side of the Marne. So long as we do not possess this security, so long as we are unable to create a new front, such as shall run counter to the plan the enemy has in mind, we cannot be sufficiently masters of the situation to make new and independent decisions with respect to operations.

"It is here, therefore, that we have to get matters cleared up:—our way lies either this way—or that."

The King is listening intently—yet with distrust. The Cloven Hoof is peeping out again . . . he has got hold of it now! It is to be a consolidation of the line or—should that not be feasible—then a further yielding of ground: "The formation of a new Front!"—In short, a general retreat from the Marne!

The blood rises to his head and is throbbing in his pulses: he taps his foot on the ground and his thoughts are chasing each other in wild confusion. A second retreat from the Marne!—What an inconceivable humiliation! Aye, in the eyes of the world, too, which he now pictures as a circle of evil ill-wishers, ranged about a stage, whereon he, and his country have, for the past four years, been bleeding and struggling: What an irretrievable decision!—How all would jeer, falling on them with the eagerness of bloodhounds!—

As the symbol of our unbroken power we *must* maintain a footing on the northern shore of the river . . . hold on there, and not yield: it was from *there* that we had to withdraw four years ago: a dozen armies have worried at us since then, and yet—we are standing there again! We must not budge from there . . . they can come to terms with us *there* . . . conclude some tolerably honourable

peace, such as we have continued to fight and suffer for—

But what these two seem to regard as no unlikely contingency in the near future presents itself to him as unthinkable, and at this moment he feels them both to be inimical—men standing on totally different ground. . . . A new Front?! *Where?! The old line of the Aisne over again?! Or on the Maas?! and then on the Rhine?!—*

The end . . . the dark, abysmal giant-maw, from facing which he has so persistently averted his eyes all this day, now suddenly confronts him. One single horror looms in sight: that of disbanded armies, hurrying homewards: then the terrible disillusionment of the masses, harried by privation . . . the Unchained Horror . . . the Red Ruin of millions now roused to fury—cheated of their hour of triumph . . . the hour for which they had so long been waiting—

He shakes his head violently, as though with a desire to annihilate all and everything:—

No—No—!

He wants to say something . . . gulps convulsively—his throat dry and empty—and he seizes the chair before him and holds on to the back. Then—what is it to be? Is he to set himself in opposition to their plans? . . . and . . . then? What then? . . .

Are they not in the right, where—on the one side, the Destiny and the lives of millions of human beings rest on those decisions, and on the other . . . only he,—his Throne—and his House—.

And—in one flash—he sees how utterly untenable is his own position—senses his helpless incapacity to even check this crushing horror advancing thus automatically—or save himself from its grip.

And, as he stands there, conscious of the presence of those others, silently awaiting his pleasure,—through all the fever throbbing in his blood, he feels the demand his position makes on him—that demand of which he has so persistently been reminded, from childhood up—and to which he has now learnt to

cling: Dignity! Do not let them see your agony—your agitation, or—your sorrow—: maintain your regal dignity! And then, with the firm will not to depart from this attitude, and with a hard, spasmodic voice, he says:—

“No:—I hope very earnestly that not another foot of ground will need to be given up—!”

There is a heavy silence.

The Field-Marshal glances towards the General, who, with compressed lips, is looking down on the map. In a second, however, he has jerked back his head and resumed the thread of his discourse across what is seemingly an open gulf:—

“We have in any case brought up whatever was within reach, or to be spared, in the way of Reserves. The Army Group is throwing forward the Twentieth Division of Infantry: these troops, coming from the Ambrief and Chacrise area, are being hurried forward to the battle-field by motor transport. It will be possible to count on them by to-morrow; and the Fifth Division of Infantry, from the vicinity of St. Quentin, is likewise coming up by motors. But, all these additional aids will only become effective in the course of the battle: we shall therefore have to await the result, and—until then, the decision will rest with the troops now in the field: I think they will hold—”

He takes a short step back—

The King's eyes are set straight in front of him, and then—suddenly they are fixed on the General—and he observes in a dry, brusque tone:—

“Yes, Your Excellency: but all this sounds rather different from what you told me about these matters four days ago—”

The slight tie there had been between the two men is severed—

The General's face flushes, but he keeps his self-control; only the voice sounds slightly harder and more grating, as he says:—

“Reverses are among the natural consequences of every war . . . but—if Your Majesty's confidence . . . ”

The King's gesture implies an emphatic negation, and it is already his earnest desire to make good any slight his words might have inflicted. So, passing on to the purely military aspect, he asks:—

“ And—as to our other undertakings? ”

The General is at once entirely the soldier:—

“ The fight before Rheims continues, as do also the initial preparations for the new push against the British northern wing in Flanders, which are being at present carried on independently of this battle. Should the fortunes of war give us the upper hand again, we wish at all events to be in complete readiness!—”

This sounds encouraging!—

“ Then, the thing is to possess one's soul in patience, and—like a good Christian, and soldier—trust in God—? ”

“ Yes, certainly—Your Majesty! ”

The King stretches his hand out to the General:—

“ I thank you: well, you have much to do . . . and so, the next time we meet, let us hope things will look better! ”

Yet he feels this to but a formula of words . . . feels that the faith in them is lacking.

He then turns to say a few more words to the Field-Marshal — mere phrases — : nothing of moment—

It is but natural that the turn events have taken on the Front should also have altered his programme; but, for the present—at all events—he intends to remain on at Bosmont, so as to be near the army until things have somewhat cleared again.

As they leave the room, a young officer is standing waiting on the landing. He has a paper in his hand, which he is about to get the Quartermaster-General to counter-sign. It is the text of the evening telegram to Wolff's Press Agency:

The King takes it from the hand of the Field-Marshal and reads the following lines:—

“ BERLIN (official), 18/7/18.

“ Between the Aisne and the Marne we have been

attacked by the French in considerable force and with armoured cars: the enemy has gained some ground. Our Reserves, standing in readiness, are taking part in the fight."

He returns the slip without comment: how harmless it sounds—and yet . . . unless God vouchsafes a miracle—it means the turning-point.

XXVIII

BUT the miracle does not happen. Dull days follow, of which the weight is almost insupportable.

The news filtering in from the new battle-field falls like heavy drops: it gives evidence of a bitter struggle: the existence of the army, in the bend of the Marne, is at stake.

Checks; obstacles; hindrances, everywhere. No:—the old spirit of the troops that wrought such wonders has fled . . . the spirit which had imbued them with *one* will; *one* strength; *one* initiative.

Suddenly this transformation has become apparent in all its nakedness. In this moment of dire necessity the veil is rent, and now two words show forth which—until now—had had but one undivided meaning:—wearing the uniform—and, following the flag.

Gone—! . . .

Now everything is saturated and undermined with a spirit of stark truculence; at every turn resentment against this blood-drenched horror, this forced participation of the masses, becomes more actively insistent: we *can* no longer—and we *will* no longer!

The belief in victory that had buoyed their hopes after the successes in the Spring has vanished . . . broken down, and in the arid soil of their dull brains, starved with the want endured through all these

years, in their poor suffering hearts, tortured by a thousand hells and deaths, now grows another seed. The countless orators, who had "explained the true state of the situation"; the ambassadors and seducers of the Party out to create trouble, had been long enough at work—and, with wild, passionate and reactionary words, such as had impinged on their imagination.

Hungry souls, both in the army and at home, were caught and spellbound by the glamour of these "fairy tales": longings and dreams; wishes and passions . . . all stirred up to the awakening:—

"Break your chains—and throw away your arms! Every man is free who does not voluntarily remain a slave!" . . .

"War is murder—the Big Men's job, who coin money from your blood! Fatherland?! Germany?! France?! . . . all an illusion! You are all brothers in misery, be the badge you wear grey or blue!—Who is nearest to you—the starving Frenchman, in the camp, sharing your bread and soup, or the officer, to whom you are no more than a brute-beast?! It lies in your power to restore the peace of the world . . . throw away your arms! . . . And—beyond all wire entanglements and trenches—lies a world of pure brotherly love, only waiting for its poor sons to find their way thither . . . the World of the Internationals!"—

And so, the army—the instrument of war—rots and disintegrates under the hands of its Leaders. Checks; obstacles; hindrances—everywhere.

Bringing up the additional forces is a work of intense difficulty, roads and railroads being exposed to heavy fire. The ground recently won has given the enemy opportunities of penetrating farther into our territory with their guns. Detraining, which was to have taken place close to the field of battle, has now to be effected at a distance far away to the rear: time is lost—time which cannot be retrieved.

Then, fighting units get separated . . . torn asunder, and cannot be massed in sufficient force to become effective.

The enemy is in evidence on all sides, bringing up his inexhaustible reservoirs of blood and material: a continual flow of fresh forces—he is for getting the best results he can out of the pressure he is now able to bring to bear against a little vanishing remnant of worn and weary divisions, that have fought till they can fight no more.

The French have reached the road south of Soissons, and their fire, directed towards the town, is pouring down on to the single line of rails and on to the high road which means blood and life to our curve on the Marne: yet—the last and decisive victory is withheld.

The young Staff Captain, at work day and night, hardly knows what it is to get out of his clothes.

The gentlemen of the King's suite, depressed and anxious, move about as though someone sick unto death were near. They form little groups and put their heads together, talking in low voices and with but few words; or, they exchange ominous glances and show care-laden brows.

Yet—when the King is near, they don their most ingenuous expressions:—"A severe crisis—of course, of course! but surmountable—oh, most assuredly so!" This being what it is considered requisite that he should feel and see—

But the Civil Chief takes no part in this game, no—nor the Count, nor his little grey Excellency, the Admiral. Indeed, the Admiral has the satisfaction of seeing his words coming true: he had "never so much as trusted the Supreme Army Command across the road"—so to speak—and now "they've gone and botched the whole business."

"Fantasts, who had too great an opinion of their powers from the very start," he opines. "People who did not know England: *he* knew England! *that he did!* Well—he had had his say at the time: and, perhaps there might now be some willing to acknowledge that worse things might happen than steering the course which had been laid down by the First Chancellor."

The King moves about restlessly. He is grey,

and the skin, smooth from the blade of the razor, is like a glistening parchment stretched over his cheek-bones. He is deeply oppressed and the dull fear that comes to him at times threatens almost to stifle him, so fraught with anguish is the very air. And all this time he feels the need of movement: a craving to divert his thoughts into some other channel.

He listens to the discourses of the different Chiefs; turns over the leaves of documents, placing his stiff, upright signature—with its characteristic flourish—to the various Notifications, Announcements and Remissions. To documents that are to take effect in the far future and which, as they now pass through his hands, seem to possess neither sense nor security. Unstable things, gliding away into darkness—

He hurries through the hours like one who is aimlessly fleeing from some dread horror; from something he knows to be behind him—yet which he dare not turn round and behold—

And—not a creature . . . not a soul to whom he can unburden his heart of its heavy agony.

So he talks to those about him on indifferent questions, simply to still the fever in his blood—and his words are even more plentiful and exuberant than ever. He will suddenly seize upon some seemingly remote question and proceed to elaborate some spontaneous thought, holding on to it—loath to let it go—and talking all the time energetically.

“A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse!” . . . anything but quiet . . . anything but this silence! It is as if his words would help to chase away the evil spirits now lying in wait around—

The theatres—and their management . . . the grand spectacular production of “Sardanapalus”! The newest discoveries of our scientific men being translated into life, action and pictures on the stage and made accessible to the people—an example such as Wildenbruch, for instance. . . . Then, England in India . . . the Art of Mosaics . . . The Nibel-

ungen, as interpreted by Hebbel—and Richard Wagner's caricature of the same.—

Fascinating as ever in his flow of conversation, carrying him away from the firm ground of his wide and actual knowledge to flights of sparkling fantasy, the while he illustrates his words with grand and sweeping gestures—and, the blue eyes set amid those noble care-worn features, shine with an almost fanatical light.

Under the impetus of words and thoughts the horror is temporarily forgotten—till the reaction comes—taking him by the throat again, to strangle the words upon his lips.

He visits the troops once more: goes to Below again: stares for hours together at the fight going on for Rheims—and knows all the time that the thing has lost all sense: Rheims—? what is Rheims to us now—? Hecuba—!

He goes over to von Conta; to the Conta Group, reviving memories of that day of triumph at the Chemin des Dames. It had been at the end of May; west of the downtrodden ruins of Craonne, upon the Winterberg, that had been taken by assault! The triumph of victory had then been over all alike! Spring-time and Faith!—And the troops had been carried forward, as though in an ecstasy of endeavour, across the Aisne and the Vesle and the Ourcq—

All gates would stand wide to them in the future—the end, so long and passionately fought for, was almost theirs to touch. . . . And all this is over: swept aside—and out of sight. Nowhere is there a way out. Broken and powerless he stands before blank and pitiless walls . . . the rain is falling . . . and all is grey—grey. And, standing before the telescope at one or other of the observation stations, on a bare hillock, rising above the muddy, swampy ground, he feels the chill and damp as it rises upward and creeps over his body, while he stares out into the mist and listens to words—words:—

“Down there, in the valley—behind the strip of undulating land—lies Chatillon; and still farther

behind, there is a river—and, all that now remains of the Tenth Reserves and of the Second Division of Guards, fought there—at Reuil-sur-Marne—to the death.”

And it seems as though the General who is speaking were no longer the same person he had known before: his carriage, voice and eyes have changed: he has aged by years and years . . . and yet—it was only eight weeks ago—

No:—this load of weary days is becoming insupportable.

XXIX

IT is Sunday, and he drives over to the church at Marle. Every seat in this lofty building—with its stone arches—is filled with the men in grey, coming from the rest camps and hospitals. Only in front, aside from the sea of bare heads; of pale, lantern-jawed and sorrow-laden faces, with here and there one that has hardened, are the officers of the *Étappe*, and then—farther along—two rows of empty chairs and one arm-chair.

The place has a smell of stale incense; of rancid leather; of clothes that have been saturated with perspiration, and of dressings and bandages. There is a scraping, moving and craning of necks as, with his helmet beneath his arm, his eyes fixed straight before him, the King strides down the centre aisle, followed by his attendant gentlemen. There is a moment of stillness.

The light, coming through the narrow stained-glass windows, falls on the gilt carvings, touches the altars, plays about the tinted figures of Saints and Angels, that from niches, alcoves and arches look down upon this strange worship of these grey men.

Then the organ—an indifferent one—plays, and they sing.

The voices rising in unison have an effect of overpowering pain, suffering and sorrow, as the wave of sound, coming from behind where he is placed, soars aloft and plays about the King. It seems to him as if in all these poor, disturbed and wistful faces he needs must see . . . : then quietly, without moving as much as a finger, he stares into vacancy: alone—none before—none beside him.

“Lobe den Herrn, der alles so herrlich regieret—
Der dich auf Adlers Fittigen selber geführt,
Der dich erhält wie es dir selber gefällt.
Hast du nicht dieses verspürt?”

Far—far away do all these things now seem to him: he is thinking of the severe and solemn beauty of the old garrison church at Potsdam: of the strong appeal made by the texts along the gallery—of the soaring eagles on the pews—of the pillars bearing those inspiring clusters of Germany's victorious flags. How often has he not heard this anthem being sung there—taken part in it himself: first as a little boy; later on as an officer, with his regiment, and then later still as the Crown Prince . . . again and again—for almost a generation.

Then he thinks—and is thrilled by the force of his own thought:—“Shall I ever hear it sung like that again?!”

But he forces his attention back to present surroundings, trying to merge himself in these, and he distinctly recognizes the different voices he can hear near by: There is the dutiful “chewing” of the Colonel-General's ancient pipe; he is performing his obligations as faithfully as ever:

“Praise the Lord, who has so visibly blessed thy station!”

And then there is the nasal, imperious intoning of the Guardsman:

“All that has breath, praise the Seed of Abraham!”

He utters the words with a slightly pained reluctance, as if he—for cogent reasons connected with his station in life—could not very well be expected to be of one mind with the worthy author, Joachim Neander. . . .

And then the Parson, chaplain to one of the withdrawn divisions, begins. His address is straightforward and well-meaning, though, perhaps, just a shade uncertain—owing to being in such close proximity to the King and all these other gentlemen, covered with gold cords and decorations, and his thoughts wander from his sermons to affairs of his own.

The Chamberlain's eyes roam about the church surreptitiously: they look grieved as they rest on the carved and life-sized figures of the Virgin and St. Joseph, both ensconced in niches respectively to the right and the left. And he looks actually concerned when contemplating the plaster Joan of Arc, with her raspberry-red cheeks and her silver-painted sword.

The King clasps his hands more tightly about his grey-covered helmet while he thinks with passionate, yet resigned emotion:—

“Lord—Lord! what have I done, that Thou should'st afflict me thus cruelly?! What sins have I committed, that Thou should'st cast such sorrows about me, my House, and my People?! ”

Then he endeavours to gather together all his thoughts in one humble petition to the Most High: and as though he would fain speak to that Eternal Unseen Presence, he now summons all his powers in the anguish of that heartfelt prayer:—

“Thou has placed me in a position such as without Thy Strength and Mercy no human being can fill: Before any steps I have ever taken, I have pondered seriously:—have prayed for Thy Illuminating Grace—and have then firmly believed that Thy Holy Will has been made known through me and my voice—”

The Parson is still talking: excellent and well-

meaning are his words, but they flow past as so much transient sound:

" . . . was I proud, or overbearing, O Lord?! I will prostrate myself before Thee! Accept this sacrifice. . . . Harken unto me! " and he prays on, imploringly:—

" Lord! Merciful and Almighty God! turn our fortunes! Thou, Who alone canst save us . . . Lord, stand by us! "

The eyes of His Excellency the Civil Chief are resting in grave concern on the faintly heaving shoulders of the King.

His thoughts are now with his troops in the fighting-line: struggling and bleeding—

" Give them strength—help them to hold out, O Lord! "

And then, too, for those at home:—

" Lead Thou those who have strayed, back to Thy true path; deliver them from the constraining influences of falsehood and madness, O Lord! so that they may find their way to the Truth! "

Then there is a shuffling and a scraping—they have all risen . . . and, with a start, the King rises also.

In front the Parson is praying . . . Amen.

And then they start singing again: it is a hymn in the King's honour, of which the worthy man has written the number on the blackboard:—

" Vater, kröne Du mit Segen
Unsern Koenig und sein Haus,
Führ durch Ihn auf deinen Wegen
Herrlich deinen Ratschluss aus."

As in a dream, he nods and draws a deep breath—

" Sammle um den Thron die Treuen,
Die mit Rat und frommem Flehn,
Fest für deiner Streiter Reihen
Für des Landes Wohlfahrt stehen :
Baue um den Koenigsthron
Eine Burg, O Gottessohn! "

On the steps, in front of the altar, stands the grey-clad Field-Chaplain, his hands folded in prayer: his heart swelling with pride: in these momentous times *he* has preached before his King—that will be something for his children and *their* children to remember!

Then he tries to follow the words of the hymn, for nothing should be neglected at such an eventful hour: and so he studies those men now present, with their gold cords and the stars on their breasts:—

“ ‘ A strong fortress! ’ yes, ‘ a tower! ’ ” . . .

Behind the King are standing the Chamberlain, the Prince, and the Colonel-General: further, the Guardsman, the fat Chief and His Naval Excellency: then, the ever-smiling Baron and the slick little Jäger—“ surely he must be a Prince.”

“ And so this is what they all look like. . . May God bless them! ”

XXX

IN the twilight of the following evening the King is again seated before the green table in his working-compartment. His mind is on the stretch, and he is gazing down on the map which the Staff Captain has left with him after making his report.

Lines: arrows: curves—and they spell Fate.

The battle is a furnace in which the hope of regaining the upper hand—the leadership—is fast melting and burning away.

Things stand ill: decay is eating in—and the enemy, by his storms and assaults at those two strangle-points south of Soissons and south-west of Rheims, is still attempting to get a tighter hold on that neck of the curve on the Marne.

Yet—and in spite of all this, a new line has been formed, which now, by dint of great tenacity, is

being held at much sacrifice. At about three kilometres west of Soissons this line extends across the Aisne, and then lies along the road at Parcy-Trigny, ceases at Neuilly, and is successfully holding the space about Château-Thierry against all the storming of the Americans.

But this cannot last indefinitely—indeed, one would have to be blind not to see this, or to leave it out of account. The railway east of Soissons, the line by which the entire area south of the Aisne subsists, is under a rain of fire day and night. Our transports have to go through Hell, and what does get through is quite inadequate for maintaining the troops at their fighting strength.

All other means, such as fleets of motor-lorries, and conveyances, are lacking. In fact, the want of all necessities is suddenly becoming evident on every hand—and this, just when the withdrawal from the southern shore of the Marne—the accomplishment of which is being anticipated with so much anxious concern—and which relies on the protection of this line—is at length to be undertaken under the cover of night.

Will it come off—undisturbed by the enemy? Or—will he follow, pressing on their heels, scenes of terror and horror being enacted about those ruined, blown-up bridges?!—

The King clasps his hands about his knees: some of those there are the Hundred and Thirty-first and the Seventh: and between them, the Tenth Colonial Division—black brutes, animated with the barbaric hatred of pitiless fanatical beasts—are pressing against our Tenth Reserves; against the Second Guards . . . and the horrible possibilities confront him; the troops cut off—and defenceless against the river—delivered over to the blood-lust and animal cruelty of these savages—

And, even should the passage succeed—should we elude them and get safely and surreptitiously across the river . . . what then?!—

He has not been over to Avesnes since that last memorable discussion: but now, with his thoughts

busied with the question, and groping in the dark, the impressions he had gathered on that occasion stand out sharply defined in every detail, as though extracted from that past—and placed in bold relief before him—

It lasts for no more than a moment . . . there is the cold, curtainless, over-lighted room; that room that knows naught but documents, map-tables and roller-maps; and has no use for the graces of life—not a picture—not a work of art—not a flower: and there is that soldier-like and stern man, with the obstinate, compressed mouth; the hard, throaty, cutting and remorseless voice:—

“So long as we are unable to create a new front, such as shall run counter to the plan the enemy has in mind, we cannot be sufficiently masters of the situation to make new and independent decisions with respect to operations. . . .”

And—then, the other: the square-set one, with his imperturbability:

“ . . . Yet, should it be necessary, a little later on, for us to place further proposals before Your Majesty . . . ”

Then they are gone again—and the past with them.

The King presses his teeth down on his lips: we have not been able to secure the safety of the west flank . . . nor shall we secure it: the enemy is pushing on . . . and our opposing force is bleeding to death—

There is now but one alternative . . . the “further suggestion,” as the Field-Marshal had so considerately put it—the retreat from the Marne, and—along any line at the rear, as the General—without further ado,—has made plain. Then that wave of hot red blood rises to his brows again, making his pulses beat with a fever of excitement.

Even in this hour, as it had been then, when the thought had confronted him for the first time, the whole thing seems unthinkable: Not this! Only not this!—not let go that last and final hope to which the whole country is clinging for support:

that hope, which in the eyes of the world, still stands for a sign—a standard and support!—

We are standing on the Marne! and—whatever they may trumpet forth in the way of victorious tidings—the French, the English and the Americans—all of it sinks to insignificance before this one fact, which they cannot confute:—the German Army is standing on the Marne!

Above all—not leave that spot! and he sees how the terrible shattering of all hopes at home must infallibly bring about a revulsion such as may give the complete leadership to the opposing passions of the Red Faction which would then be ready to swamp everything that has hitherto been accounted firm and secure, taking on itself the rôle of Heir and Saviour!—

And to think how this will be viewed by all other nations!—

“They are finished,” they will say, “and what is still to come is but collapse—*débâcle*. . . .”

And in staring at this picture of the future it is as though his pride were being trodden underfoot; as though the garment of his regal dignity was being torn from his body—and he were being delivered over naked to the hatred and the ridicule of the mob—

Hunted and driven; confined and held in bondage does he feel when contemplating with foreboding what may yet stand in his path: Only not live to see *that!* and in his emotion, he thinks:—

“No:—then it were better to meet one’s end here . . . here, at the turn of what has so far been reached—should God so ordain . . . but not have to see *that!*—”

And two words stand out before him: “Remain” and “Fight!” His lips have parted: his gums, his tongue, are parched and dry: he is continuously obliged to gulp: It is like the tense fever of the chase—a strenuous waiting, with the heart almost standing still . . . as if a way might yet be found; some possibility of rescue be revealed. . . .

Remain, and—fight . . . : hindrances seem to depart—his fantasy takes wing,—freed from all

check: to stand there, at the head of the troop . . . in front of them all—to be in the storm and assault! He feels this uprising of his soul's emotions even as he might a stream of light—like some sudden rebound from all his tortures, and in the hot fever of his surging impulse his thoughts go back to the blare of the trumpets at the great cavalry attacks of past and gone manœuvres . . . he thinks of "alarums and excursions" . . . of a scene in "Piccolomini," and remembers one particular performance at the *Schauspielhaus*: Matkowsky had taken the part of Max, and then there had been the account given by the Swedish Captain of the last assault of the Pappenheim Curassiers at Neustadt—and the heroic death of Colonel Piccolomini . . . to fall like that; and then, for all Eternity—for future ages and for History, to have gained the epitaph:—"He also died a hero for Germany's sacred and rightful cause: The German King!"

His name blazoned glorious and unforgettable in the same wreath with hundreds and thousands of other names of German Heroes!—

Meeting a fate, such as across the trials of the past should unite the dynasty and its future generations anew to all the people.

He is now in a state of elation, as though carried aloft on wings: he sees romantic visions and pictures stupendous results . . . a whole people now acclaiming the outcast—the one so oft abused . . . and lines arise in his marvellous and ever-ready memory:—

"This morning

We buried him. Twelve youths of noblest birth
Did bear him to internment: The whole army
Follow'd the bier. A laurel deck'd his coffin;
The sword of the deceased was placed upon it
In mark of honour, by the Rhine-grave's self.
Nor were tears wanting; for there are among us
Many who had themselves experienced
The greatness of his mind, and gentle manners;
All were affected by his fate."¹

¹ "The Death of Wallenstein": IV act, 4 scene. (The Swedish Captain is telling Tekla of the death of Max.)

Remain—fight! . . . in front of a division—he stops short and his eyelids flutter. No: in the centre of the troop—with the regiment . . . with the battalion—

But his state of great elation is already on the wane . . . uncertainty; hindrances; obstacles, are obtruding themselves—Fantasy is up against Reality.

It is as if all the lights has suddenly been turned off and he were standing in the dark. . . .

He is feeling about for something, and recalls the storming he saw the other day when watching through the telescope: pictures what it was in Champagne and before Rheims: sees the activity of countless tiny dots—human beings . . . escaping from mud and corruption, who struggle forward—and then vanish again into trenches, mine-holes, ditches—or, torn to shreds past all recognition—just remain, lying amid that dirt—

He moves his head: Nothing there of that heroism of the past—only a headlong running against the guns that blindly kill the one and leave the other—

He thinks:—" And it is possible, too, one might never be found there after all—only left rotting amid that horror—for all time! "

And the brilliancy fades from his eyes. He sees faces—soldiers' heads, such as he has seen constantly in these days: stubborn and embittered, like driven animals, far—far removed from him. Eyes that look with a glare of bitter spite; as though to say:—

" What do you want here—near us? You in your car? You with your Standard flying? what do you feel of our sufferings? "—

Go to the assault with them?—As a stranger—lonely, and without aught in common with them? And he catches at this fleeting freak of a thought, and at the same time knows quite well that it is an excuse:—

" I don't know as much as the new Rules for Service in the Field or even the words of command

—any non-commissioned officer, or leader of a group, knows these things better than I do—”

And then another thought: “Supposing that I were not killed at once—only wounded . . . and *the others* were to pick me up—and recognize me?! No: anything better than to fall into the hands of the enemy for the sake of my dignity—for the sake of the entire German Nation!”

He passes his hand over his forehead: his fingers tremble; his skin is cold and damp, as the fever of his dream passes away.

But he is still worrying at the thought:—

“What if I chose to take this step—in spite of everything? Would they allow me to act as I chose? Would I be able to assert myself against the gentlemen at Avesnes? The horror with which the Chamberlain would call upon Heaven—the expostulations of all the rest?—”

And here in the quiet it seems to him as if he could hear their voices:—

“The sacred life of Your Majesty must on no account be exposed—”

“The Supreme War Lord may—as little as the leading General—risk his life—? No! Your Majesty has no right to expose yourself to such dangers—”

Talk—talk—talk . . . but it would gain its purpose!

And he is filled with increasing bitterness:—

“Possibly I might get some sort of company of officers together in order to enforce my will—a company of officers from those fit for garrison-duty at some safe position, with some sturdy old general to look after them and with my old Colonel-General at his side to act as a reliable ‘brake’! and then, every one of those conscientious gentlemen would feel themselves personally responsible for me—and the whole thing would be a sort of glorified suite in a laughable fighting get-up . . . a farce!”

Then some words occur to him; certain lines from Hamlet, whose struggle, too, had centred in “to be, or not to be”;—

“Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all.”

Coward?—no!—It is not cowardice if he does not take this path: it has nothing to do with either cowardice or courage! It is a King's Fate: sternly hedged in by ties, duties and conventions—and which must be endured, even to the end, since God, in His inscrutable Wisdom has so decreed—

Remain—fight?—Again he passes his hand over his brow: yet this time it is as though he were dispersing the shreds of some misty web—

He feels weary and tired to death.

He looks across the map and away into the open. Two men are standing in the evening light, under the trees—talking. They are the Civil Chief and the Count.—

There is still something working in his mind—what is it that his thoughts are groping after?—

Ah, yes! it is this: farther along, in the same scene, there are these lines:—

“ And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought;
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn away,
And lose the name of action——”

XXXI

TWO men are standing beneath the trees in the evening light, talking.

The Count says in a tired voice:—

“ Yes . . . and to think of everything they are reproaching him with now! With practically everything they formerly admired and rejoiced in. And in all this—I cannot help asking myself, Your Excellency—have not Germans *wanted* him to be just as he is . . . and have they not *deserved* that he should be so? No people has, for the span of

an entire generation, the King it has not itself desired to have! Have they not, in spite of all seeming excuses, been perpetually looking over to France and to England—preening themselves, so to speak, under the supposition that other countries were envying them . . . on account of that very possession? And, not alone, the Germans of the 'Right' . . ."

His Excellency inclines his head and the Count continues:—

"Would they not have lauded him as the greatest man of all times had—let us say—Colonel von Schlieffen but lived a few years longer . . . and had we had just a little better luck in this war? Are luck and misfortune—happiness and unhappiness—the measures wherewith to judge either worth or indifference? No: people have become unjust towards him. . . ."

They are now walking quietly up and down in the dusk along the narrow path skirting the meadow. The Count's downcast eyes are fixed on the grass, as though seeking there for further words to add to the thread of his thoughts:—

"They sinned against him from his childhood up," he continues, "a puritanical upbringing as the preparation for an ultimate destiny of which the outlines were ever presented in the most romantic forms. All feeling was stultified to that one end, which at the same time was tricked out with a halo of religious superstition. It seems to me that even simpler and more practical natures than his would have lost their hold on the realities of everyday life . . . and then—that conflict with himself, owing to which he has never reached to any pitch of true independence. You, Your Excellency, saw him when he was a youth—at Bonn?"

The other nods:—"At that time we were all young and immature.—Life itself only gave us our final form later on."

"That is what I contend: but he has become what those about him have chosen to make of him. That intimate world of his ever complacent and

ingratiating—agreeing *entourâgé*—and then, the wider world of obliging, ever-agreeing Germans. For even they have—until these latter times of misfortune—rarely said an opposing word—though—yes . . . on one single occasion!—how long ago is it?—ten years . . . on the eighth of November. Everywhere—wherever he showed himself—there was that same voluntary chorus of rejoicing; giving him to understand: ‘ You are exactly after our own heart! ’ It was so at parade, and on his journeys—and when riding out, Unter den Linden, or in the Tiergarten. I, as adjutant, can speak of these things, for I witnessed the same scenes daily, for years. Is it surprising, then, that all this created a gulf between his romantic conception of Royal Might and Dignity, and the mere meaning now attaching to the position, of a representative maintained for purposes of State? No: Germans have wanted him to be as he is! . . .”

A nod is the only answer.

Silently and quietly they continue their walk beside the water and along past the willows, both lost and engrossed in thought.

Then the Count breaks the silence again with:—

“ Yet how naturally pure must be his heart when one but considers how kindly he always is, and that—wherever the actual man is in question—he has managed to remain so unspoiled. I can see his weaknesses—and his virtues, and I know one thing: he has—from the purest motives—always wanted to do the best—”

His Excellency raises his short-sighted eyes and a faint smile plays about his saddened features, as he says:—

“ *et voluisse sat est?* ”

But the Count gently shakes his head in the negative:—

“ Our times are hardly in a condition to profit by such modest—and rather depressing—wisdom—”

They take a few more turns: and then he adds:—

“ They are getting farther away from him every day. . . .”

And the other, who, stooping forward and with his hands crossed on his back, looks almost like some bound captive in the fading light, sighs, is silent—and then says gently, albeit with conviction:

“The judgment of this world will range itself against him. Blame? Weakness? Fate? Who shall say? The good he would fain have done has turned to misfortune: the Dead Man in the *Sachsenwald* was right—after all.”

XXXII

THE report which the General Staff Officer brought the King the next morning seemed to indicate some slight improvement in the situation. The night retreat from the south side of the Marne had been effected without mishap. The enemy had not been aware of what was taking place, and when he started firing the next morning he found that he was playing on a deserted position. The remnants of those fine divisions that had lain there fighting for a week—in a veritable hell—had been got into safety.

Added to this the attacks on the west Front seem to show signs of cessation: the battle in the area between Soissons and Château-Thierry seems to be quietening down. The situation offers, therefore, some vantage ground for obtaining a more general view of things, enabling a balance to be struck, such as may afford some indication as to what we may yet be capable of undertaking.

Both the men at Avesnes are weighing the possibilities.

The young officer asked permission to go over himself in order to hear personally from their lips what they thought as to the development of events.

Certainly! by all means! there might then be some chance of getting a clear idea. And while all this is going forward, the King roams about in restless and nervous distress.

Perhaps that now—! Just now—! the decision is being arrived at—But no: he must not think about it! Yet—it is there . . . clinging to—fastening on him—it will not be dismissed . . . and it warns him . . . warns him—

He motors over again to the Staff of one of the groups—to see no more than the same picture he has so often seen in these latter days: an artificially bolstered-up faith, prating of hope and the belief in a rebound of fortune—and in between all this—pauses, through which peer anxiety and deep distress—

He visits one of the big hospitals behind the lines where lie the victims of the battle: Germans and strangers—just as they were struck down—a thousand and more. . . .

He goes from ward to ward—his grey helmet on his arm, as though he were in church, and—behind him, with clinking spurs and a discreet clank of swords—follow the others . . . closing up—keeping in touch—

And so he goes from bed to bed. Holds pale, waxed hands in his; strokes the bony arms and looks into fever-stricken eyes: talks to them in a voice far removed from what would seem connected with the stately importance of that suite, grouped around him in the background. Talks in a voice addressed solely to those lying there in pain—a voice that would fain say to them:—"I, too, am suffering—even as you."

"And you, my dear boy, where did it get you?"

The dressing about the shoulder is a shapeless lump—the arm—

"At Dormans, Your Majesty": and the eyes raised to him have a look as if the boy were gazing up at his own father.

"At the passage of the Marne—on the night of the fifteenth?"

"Yes, Your Majesty . . . but we did it!"

The King nods: he feels as if he could hardly bear it, and he blurts out:—

"Indeed you did!—you fought like heroes—!"

and as he says the words, the knowledge that it has all been in vain rises in his heart with an almost overpowering sense of bitterness and pain—all in vain. . . .

He lays the little black iron cross, with its green branch and his own portrait, upon the coverlet, feeling almost as though he were playing the part of a deceiver . . . and then he passes on to the next.

There are beds, too, where, on the blackboard, above the sufferer's head, is a little circle drawn in white chalk. The Surgeon-in-Charge had intimated its meaning, in spite of all the expressive frowns and winks of the Colonel-General: such cases were past human aid, yet might they still take pleasure in this last honour—and here too, the King pauses to hold the hand grown limp and heavy—to look into eyes now dim and dazed from the effect of opiates. . . .

Joy—honour—? How these words weigh on him now: it seems as if the firm belief he had held in all this were gone. . . .

And then, beside one bed, his hand seems to hesitate—

The man, probably somewhat over forty, has been most terribly burnt: a mummy, bound up in wadding and white bandages—and about that poor, wrapped-up face no more than the eyes are visible—such eyes. As their fevered gaze is turned upon the King—on the fret and fuss of the surrounding world—they seem to show that concentrated hate he has seen in those evil, brutish faces about the roads and streets.

Joy—Honour?

He has turned pale to the very lips at the sudden shock of revelation, and, with his heart almost standing still, he thinks:—

“How do I know that with their last parting breath they may not curse me?”

And without further words he turns—and leaves.

XXXIII

LATE that evening the General Staff Officer returns to Bosmont. He is harassed; pale; agitated:

A report?—

The King need only give one glance at the worried-looking boyish face to see what news he is bringing him—

“No:—No more to-day: to-morrow morning. . . .”

And now he is alone again—and in torture all night long . . . getting neither sleep nor rest . . . his last remaining strength put out in a thousand plans and thoughts: in futile attempts to stem this fate that is coming nearer and nearer.

XXXIV

BUT early the next morning the young Staff Captain comes to the King bringing the report from the Supreme Army Command as to the existent situation.

Their analysis of the conditions is as stern and unflinching in the demands they put forward for dealing with this state of things. At times, while listening to these words, it almost seems to the King as if he were hearing the voice of the General himself—with its sharp, incisive tones—and yet it is only the young officer, fulfilling his sorrowful duty:—

“Though it has undoubtedly been possible, during the course of the battle, to stem the rush of their onward sweep by giving up ground to the distance of the road close to Hartennes, and while, moreover,

the enemy has not obtained his objective, in spite of his push, we have nevertheless not succeeded in securing the upper hand in such a manner as would be requisite for any independent action; nor are we at present in a position to regain this. The bend on the Marne is now indeed more seriously threatened than ever before, and the enemy can—in view of these new conditions—turn his attention afresh against the weak positions to the south of Soissons. Our chances, then, since we have no possible means of bringing up fresh material, would be practically *nil*. It would be foolhardiness to hazard massing the troops now fighting south of the Vesle in so risky a business—calling on them to hold the position at any price.

“And so:—the thing is to get out of it!—As a preliminary—a retreat as far as the Ourcq—and then on to beyond the Vesle, by the shortest route of Soissons-Rheims. This can all be done without undue haste, and after the removal of all supplies and materials. Here at Vesle we are safely rid of the anxiety to which those three useless sides exposed us and we can then use our concentrated strength for the defensive, as at any other point, having troops free to put in the field should it come to any new battles of defence. For it is quite clear that the enemy intends to make the most of the superiority he has wrung from us. The last battle showed the Americans ready for the first time and in the fighting line, so that the hope that we might break the enemy prior to this occurrence has been shattered. What now remains to us—in face of the tremendous extent to which the enemy’s forces have been increased, is to defend such lines as we may ourselves be able to choose as being favourable.

“Such a change over to the defensive, obliging the enemy to attack difficult positions, would mean great sacrifices to them—and may possibly even find them ready and willing to conclude peace.

“This puts an end to any further attack on Rheims, as also to the plans we had entertained with regard to Flanders. The general situation demands

the concentration and most economical husbanding of all our forces, as well as a massing for defence along the entire line.

"That is what remains to us—and of that we are capable. Indeed, it allows of a good deal, and time will thus be gained: time, which may some day give us back the upper hand and also which the Foreign Office may be able to make the most of."

Then the Staff Captain ceases.

The King's aspect is grave, almost petrified; his brow has the pallor of wax and the eyes have a far-away look.

There have been no expostulations, no interruptions, no contradictions.

It is as if all that he has so many countless times been suffering in anticipation could, now that it is here—confronting him as a fact—no longer take effect—

There is nothing but this strange, stony calm.

The Staff Captain makes a slight movement: then the King raises his head and his lips part: but there is no sound. He only shakes his head—then presses the button of the electric bell on the table. Old Schulz comes to the door; though the King has only noticed his presence by the sound of the door.

"The Colonel-General—"

There is silence. The early morning light touches the haggard face: the skin has the tint of ochre against the soft silver-grey of the hair.

He thinks:—"It seems like a stroke—and if that were so . . . then these things would be far from me now—almost vanquished. . . ." He cannot himself quite understand this strange dull calm. Then, when the old Commandant of Headquarters stands before him, he says what remains to be said in a few matter-of-fact words: the only thing is that he feels the whole time as if it were someone else who is speaking—for he himself is so unmoved—so lifeless:—

"Well, after the news brought me by the Staff Captain there does not seem much more for me to do here—so we will leave . . . leave this afternoon.

You will therefore be so good as to make all the necessary arrangements. I shall go to Spa, stopping first at Avesnes. As far as that I will travel by motor, and the train can be in readiness to meet me after I have seen the gentlemen of the *Suprême Army Command*: can this be done? "

"Certainly, Your Majesty! "

"Thank you—" he nods to both officers—and is alone again. He hears a train rattling past along a side-line: sees a man with a saw and an axe passing through the neglected old orchard . . . and he thinks again:—

"It is almost as if something had snapped within me—as if something had been killed . . . before *this* had quite touched me—" and dim, dull and heavy is the feeling about his heart.—

XXXV.

IT is late in the afternoon when he takes leave of Bosmont. Not a word escapes him: but his gaze rests once more upon the countryside to which he had come eight days before, his heart then full of the highest hopes and confidence. He looks about him; nods quietly, and enters the car. It starts, and in less than a quarter of an hour the train is also proceeding on its way.

The drive along the grey roads seems longer than ever: they pass through villages the misery of which seems to preclude their ever experiencing a new day: past grey meadows and past sombre woods.

To their left the setting sun is shedding the blood-red glory of its declining rays across the distant undulating land.

His lips are firmly set—as though they could never part again and a taste of bitterness clings about them. . . .

Dusk is falling as they halt before the iron gates of the little house.

He draws himself to his full height and with his figure straight and erect, salutes to the right and to the left.

Then—the short flight of steps again; the hall—and that map-room, with the electric bulbs suspended from their wires giving a sharp and yellow light. The windows are shrouded with black hangings: there is quite another feeling about the room now . . . it is cold and ghostly.

Three men stand about the great map-table, resting on its wooded trestles.

The Field-Marshal says some kindly and pious words: warm-hearted, respectful and confident. Yet is it as though these words fell dead as they leave his lips—as if they fell into a dark and open grave. No: there is really not much more to be said—

The King's eyes are cast on the ground, as he thinks:—

“It is as if we were standing about a dead body—”

Then he looks up and presses the Field-Marshal's hand:—

Away—away—!

And again the onward rush of the grey cars.

They glide down the hill—roll along the rue de Mons and past the bushes now shrouded in the blackness of the night amidst which rises the monument to the little Tambour Stroh.

And now they have reached the station.

A dim, meagre half-circle of curious people is waiting: orderlies; militia men; motor drivers; slightly wounded soldiers, whose bandages show up against the dark.

The step is let down . . . the King strides through the door and into the station. . . .

It is dim: all the lights being darkened—one can see no more than a few steps in advance.

A few individuals are standing on the platform; their chests thrown out: the calves of their legs bent well back: their eyes rigidly fixed on space—as if petrified: They are the fat Town Com-

mandant, with his Adjutant and the acid Station Commandant.

Then the King passes these warriors with a salute, his step firm—his head thrown back. Spurs are clinking over the stones.

Now he has entered the carriage and is standing for a few moments gazing out of the window. The tower of the Church of St. Nicolas looms black, squat and square against the night skies—

Down below the mighty Local Man, who is still engaged in repressing the central rotundity of his person, remarks to his spare lieutenant:—

“His Majesty is looking fit—every inch a King!” . . .

Silently, almost imperceptibly, the train starts gliding on its way. Old Schulz now stands behind the King, relieving him of sword, helmet and cloak . . . the speed increases. . . .

The King enters his work-compartment: stands there for a moment, looking about him, bewildered—passes a hand across his brow . . . then he drops into his chair as though struck down—and with outstretched arms, lets his head sink on to the green table. . . . The train is tearing forward now at full speed—all its lights are shaded, as it rushes headlong into the night.—

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